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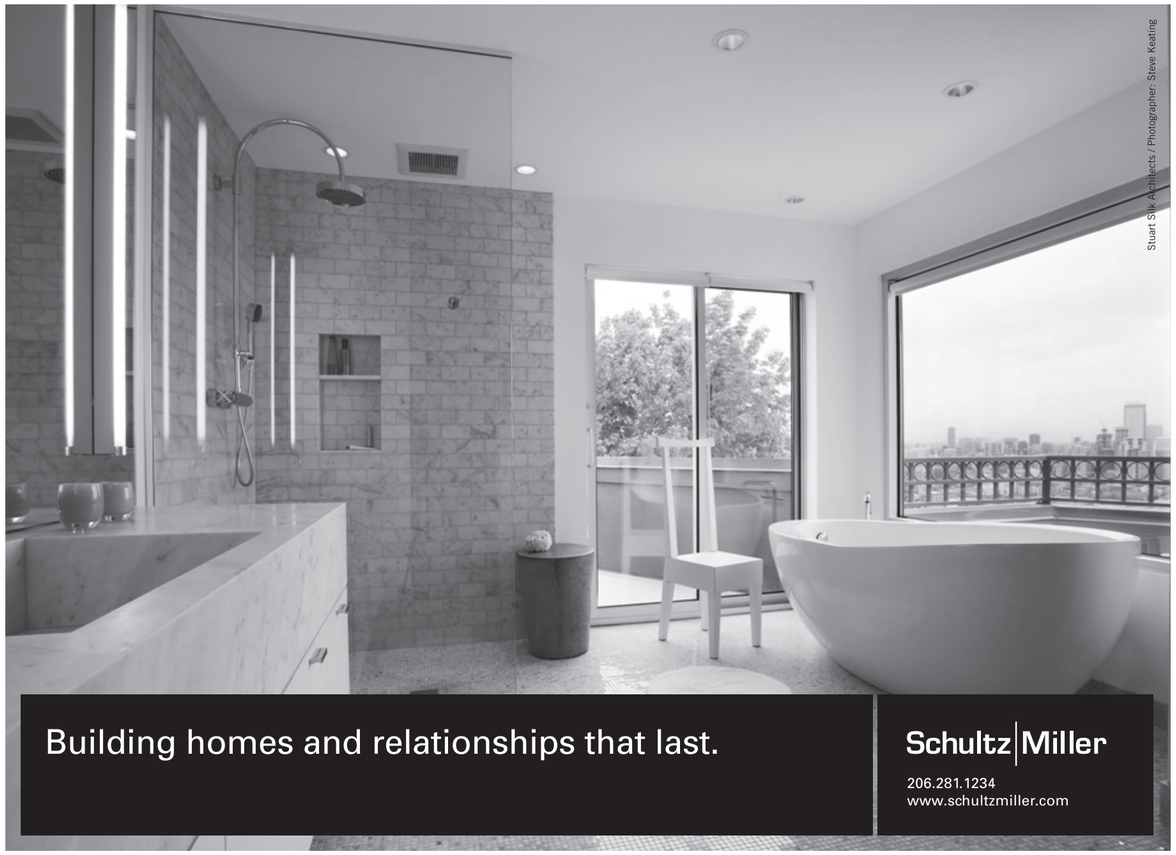
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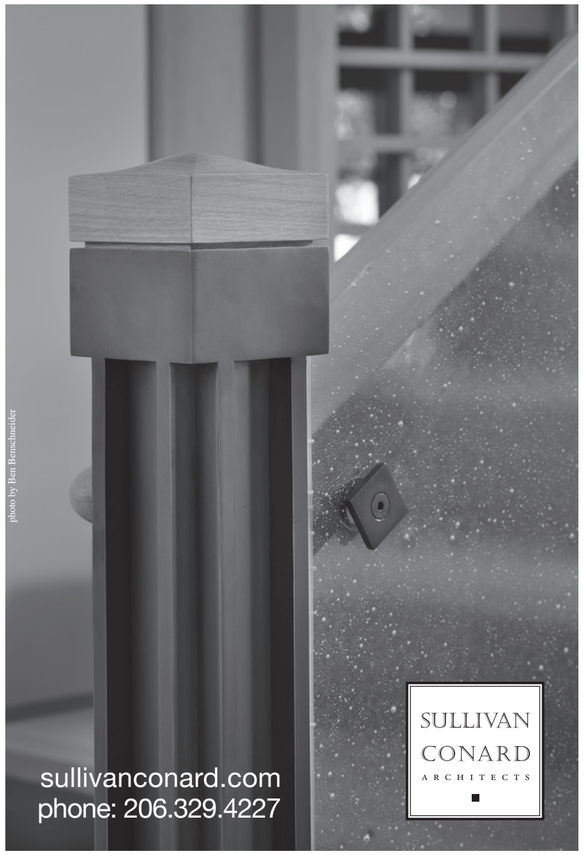


Wish You Were Here

THE CONTINUING LIFE OF LAKE WILDERNESS LODGE

Jeffrey Karl Ochsner

Many guests arrived by private plane, landing at the adjacent airstrip, for the preview opening of Gaffney's Lake Wilderness Lodge on Thursday, June 22, 1950. The 2,400-foot long grass airstrip, "with ample tie-down space for private planes," was just one of the modern facilities touted by the Lake Wilderness resort.

The new Lodge, the centerpiece of the resort, opened to the public on June 24. Architects Young, Richardson, Carleton & Detlie described the building as being based on "modern Swiss Alpine architecture"—now, of course, we see it as one of the early buildings of Northwest regional modernism. The Lodge won a Washington AIA Honor Award in 1951; the next April it was one of only three buildings to receive national AIA Honor Awards. Today, Lake Wilderness Lodge recalls the emergence of mid-century modern architecture in the Northwest and reminds us of the history of the region as a vacation destination as well as its urbanization over the last sixty years.

In the early 1900s, property owners along Lake Wilderness, which had previously been the site of a large sawmill, opened their land as a hunting and fishing camp. Tom and Kane Gaffney had acquired the land by 1926 and the next year advertised Lake Wilderness Grove with picnic grounds, a sandy beach, furnished cabins, recreational facilities and other attractions including a large dance pavilion and a roller skating rink. The resort prospered, even during the Depression, as it was away from the city yet much closer than any of the national parks. In 1949, the Gaffneys initiated major improvements including the new Lodge. Construction began in October 1949 and was completed the following June.

TOP: Ben Benschneider
ABOVE: City of Maple Valley

The design of the 85- by 271-foot lodge is particularly dramatic with a large, glazed dining room opening to a cantilevered concrete deck with a view of the lake and beyond to Mount Rainier. The primary materials of the exterior are the smooth-finished light-colored stucco contrasting with hand-riven, dark stained cedar boards. The broad gabled roof was originally topped with light-green, marble chips.

The most notable feature of the interior is the 35-foot tall cedar tree trunk, five feet in diameter at the base, sculpted by Northwest master wood-carver Dudley C. Carter (1891-1992), who drew upon Northwest Native American motifs for the design. Serving as the primary structural column in the center of the lobby, this sculpture is surrounded by a free-standing curved staircase that links the ground/beach level, the main lobby (where the lounge and dining room were originally located) and the mezzanine. The ceiling of the lobby dining room is Douglas-fir with exposed fir beams—one of the earliest applications of this motif that would become ubiquitous in the regional Northwest modern architecture of the 1950s and 1960s.

When Lake Wilderness Lodge opened in 1950, publicity described it as the "most modern and beautifully appointed resort in the Pacific Northwest." In addition to the rooms in the east wing of the Lodge, there were both new and old cabins along the lake. The main dining room in the lobby accommodated 125 with additional space on the outdoor deck in fair weather. The lower level outdoor fireplace and barbecue pit provided more informal dining.

The Gaffneys said the opening of the North Bend-Tacoma Highway led to their decision to expand the resort, but the new highway was also a harbinger of the future suburban development that would eventually reach Lake Wilderness. The property remained in private hands just sixteen years, then King County purchased the resort to use as a public park. Over the years the dance hall, roller skating rink and cabins were removed.

In 1997, the Lodge was designated a King County Landmark as a significant example of "post-war Northwest architecture." The same year Maple Valley incorporated as a city, and six years later the city acquired Lake Wilderness Park. Koppe Wagoner Architects designed the conversion of the residential wing of the Lodge to city offices and meeting rooms.

In 2008-9, Maple Valley turned to SHKS Architects for restoration/rehabilitation of the exterior and Makers Architecture & Urban Design for the interiors. The project included restoration of the exterior materials, repair of the cantilevered concrete deck and handrail, seismic upgrades, insulation to improve energy performance and restoration of historically significant parts of the interiors.

In 2011, Historic Seattle recognized Lake Wilderness Lodge with a "Best Rehabilitation Project" award for the "exemplary approach to renovating a significant mid-century Modern building, providing needed upgrades while respecting the integrity of the original design." The Lodge now serves as a popular location for events (especially weddings), as well as seminars and conferences.

JEFFREY KARL OCHSNER, FAIA, is a professor of architecture at the University of Washington. He is the author of *Lionel H. Pries, Architect, Artist Educator: From Arts and Crafts to Modern Architecture* (2007). His new book about the UW Department of architecture furniture studios will be published in early 2012.

Abigail Guay

Housepainters

For more than a decade, Katharina Grosse, born 1961 and Berlin-based, has received sought-after commissions to produce site-specific works for acclaimed institutional and public spaces. Using a compressed-air spray gun, the tool of a housepainter, she sprays vivid colors evocative of children's sidewalk chalk and marbles directly onto wall, floor, ceiling and window surfaces, sometimes incorporating into the composition objects like enormous balloons, hot-wire-cut Styrofoam, discarded-seeming clothing and dirt. (The latter, when overlaid with swirls of bright paint, recalls the keepsake glass containers of colored sand assembled by children at county fair booths and assiduously carried upright during the car trip home to avoid mixing the layers.) Grosse employs the tools of an architect – maquettes, CAD programs – to consider a space, but when she crawls into her painting jumpsuit and aims her spray gun, improvisations are highly likely.

Grosse (whose name in German is an adjective signifying greatness or, by introducing an umlaut over the "o," big-ness) has said of her large-scale work, "My knowledge of how my installations function is very precise; they're about expanding small experience. By making something small really large, you slow the information, and time, down, like slow motion" (January 3, 2011 interview, artforum.com). The artist's painted installations are, in sheer size, arresting. To even begin to take one in, you must commit to investigating multiple vantage points, to standing still and scanning from one edge of your peripheral vision to the other.

If LeWitt's measured, linear work is basic math, Grosse's is physics, the introduction of time and space.

Intentionally or not – and relative to her own statements about her process, I guess not – Grosse is producing an abstracted version of graffiti, a movement that helped permanently change notions of scale, place and technique. Her spray gun is an outsized spray paint can, and her mucking-up of the architecture (including her literal, although sanctioned, bombing of an occasional building facade) is done with a graffiti artist's emphasis on art over the conveniently large and available building. There is something thrilling about the audacity, the knowing when looking that someone is going to have to clean, shovel, cover and otherwise work very hard to remove the painting from the installation space. (The painted-over windows are particularly cheeky.)

Prehistoric cave paintings aside, artists have been painting walls in what is now Europe since well before the Common Era. (Frescoes preserved in the ruins of Pompeii reveal an aptitude for portrait, landscape and architectural renderings equivalent to the much more renowned sculptural work of the same period.) Grosse is on the current tail end of a very long history of artists who have broken the boundaries of a tried-and-true art painting surface in order to explode their compositions onto the adjacent architecture and/or other uncommon supports. And as with each of these historical artists, she is using the visual vernacular of her time.

One Floor Up More Highly, Grosse's 2010 installation in the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art's main gallery, one of the largest in the world, is a series of crystalline cut-Styrofoam structures set in painted real and faux earthen mounds and immersed in colored passages of architecture. All components are notably very, very big. Notable also is the work's proximity to *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective,* an extended-term exhibition of architecture-scale wall drawings, over 100 total, showcasing LeWitt, an artist at the forefront of the mid-20th-century Conceptual and Minimalist art movements.

If LeWitt's measured, linear work is basic math, Grosse's is physics, the introduction of time and space. And this makes sense in the context of the artists' not-really-overlapping career spans and their positions on the big-painting continuum. LeWitt (and his peers) explored the least one could do to create an identifiable and acceptable artwork, while Grosse pushes what she does with painting to see what extra or different elements she can successfully sneak in, what size or relationship to architecture is a lot, but not too much.

ABIGAIL GUAY is Program Manager at Grantmakers in the Arts.

ABOVE: Katharina Grosse, *One Floor Up More Highly,* 2010. On display at MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, December 2010 to October 2011.
PHOTO: Arthur Evans

Open Houses

Abigail Guay

By assigning them well-worn domestic environments, the artwork would compete with voyeurism of the kind that compels a person to peek into lighted windows at night, a rare glimpse of a private space earned through neither trust nor friendship.

This summer, a dozen artists wrapped, cut into and painted five houses on the north end of Bellevue Avenue East, a block before it unravels to become Bellevue Place and Bellevue Court. The artists were invited to do so by MadArt, an organization dedicated to presenting public art in Seattle. ("Mad" is short for Madison Park, the location of the group's first project in 2009.) The site of the installations, collectively known as *Mad Homes*, is the location of a Point32 development project—the five structures will be relocated or salvaged and replaced by new Weinstein A|U-designed housing.

Approaching the block from the south on July 16, the day the project opened to the public, visitors encountered four visibly altered structures. (The fifth home, a more recent construction with a phenomenal view, was tucked behind one of the street-side buildings.) Laura Ward's *Skin* slumped in front of one residence. Made by applying latex rubber to the exterior of the house and then lifting it off, along with all the building's accumulated grime, *Skin's* surface resembled a rust-stained Victorian undergarment. Navigating the adjacent, crowded front yards, the smell of latex was an occasional breeze-born presence.

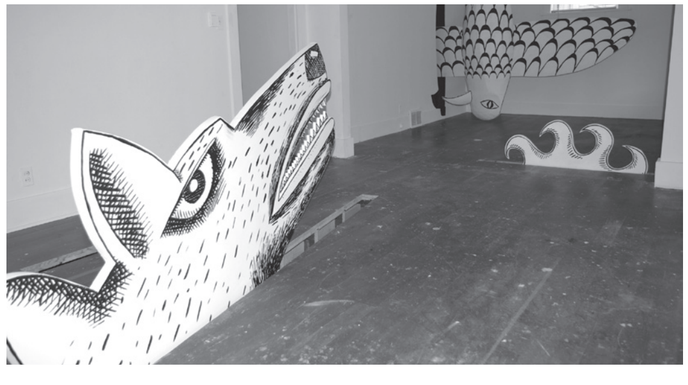
The difference between house and home is a well-documented subject of literature, marriage vows and greeting cards. A house is a structure and a home is the site of living, of feeling and doing. By identifying the buildings (post-gingerbread, early 20th-century houses for families of four or five with large, awkward closets tucked under the eaves) as homes, MadArt underscored the challenge it presented the *Mad Homes* artists: By assigning them well-worn domestic environments, the artwork would compete with voyeurism of the kind that compels a person to peek into lighted windows at night, a rare glimpse of a private space earned through neither trust nor friendship. This was not so much public art as a private exchange unveiled for an audience.

One of the five homes remained occupied and was peppered with signage requesting that due courtesy be paid. Wrapped by artist trio SuttonBeresCuller in red polypropylene ratchet straps and bound by dozens of bright red lines to an adjacent, empty building, it was easy to imagine these holdout residents waving through their windows at the artists as they bobbed up and down in a blue man-lift. How odd to distinguish oneself as a pioneer by being the last in a place, rather than the first.

Several artists took the charge of manufacturing a "mad home" literally, prosaically creating art that behaved like construction or interior materials or selecting construction materials as art supplies. A kitchen and living space, gutted, save an ugly counter and cabinet piece installed sometime in the '80s (forgive us this decade, all who follow), was the setting for Luke Haynes' *Wall Clothes*, a floor-to-ceiling patchwork of discarded garments. One room featured kaleidoscopic clothing; the other was an allover black. And the construction was beautiful: all clothing on a plane, tidily stitched together. But Haynes' square of panties – all styles, all colors – installed in a nearby stairwell was more interesting for its untidiness, for having little bits of lace and nylon hanging as garment and gravity dictated. Acts of dislocation, the effects of which hung heavy in the air above this city block, do not a tidy life or place make.

Allan Packer's installation, *The Fulcrum of Prescience,* made the most of the domestic environment. Occupying the entire ground level of a home, *Fulcrum* comprised man-sized, flat cutouts of a wolf and bird that moved mechanically between walls and levels through slots cut into the plaster and floorboards—the back-and-forth motion was like the triggering of moveable paper components in a pop-up book. Accompanied by a suspended, twirling and red-lighted jewel shape, the effect of the intervention was both playful and eerie. Packer had the luxury of working in a building that he could cut into the meat of to reorder its bones. From those bones, he conjured an image of what was or will be, giving shape to the hum of a home preparing to be dead before its time.

ABIGAIL GUAY is Program Manager at Grantmakers in the Arts.



TOP: *Mad Homes,* street view.
PHOTO: Bryan Ohno
RIGHT: Allan Packer, *The Fulcrum of Prescience*
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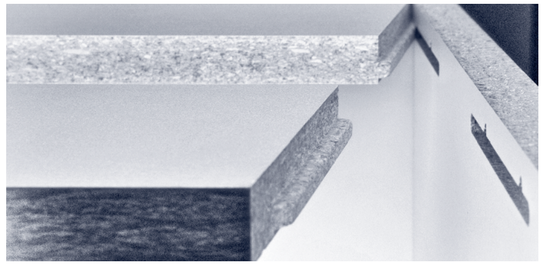

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Believing In Architecture

AN INTERVIEW WITH BILLIE TSIEN, TWBTA

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This last summer we sat down with Cooper Hewitt National Design Award-winning architect Billie Tsien at her Manhattan office on Central Park South. Billie and her husband Tod founded Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects in 1986 and have completed master works such as The American Folk Art Museum and The Neurosciences Institute in La Jolla; currently they are working on the controversial Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia. Billie graciously shared some of the behind the scenes process and thinking of their successful architecture practice with us.

Can you tell us a bit about your firm's start-up? I finished graduate school in 1977 and went to work for Tod; I've been here ever since. At that time the office was in Carnegie Hall where live/work studios were built just after the recital hall was completed. The studios are now under renovation and will become a music school. The office operated out of a penthouse on the top floor with huge skylights and no air conditioning. Tod and I married in 1983, and we moved to our current location on Central Park South in 1981, where we had three to four people in the office. We're currently at 25 people, and we typically have four interns for a period of six months each. Our current staff is down from what it was, and it feels like a good size.

Is there a sweet spot for size in an architecture firm? A team anywhere from about 12 to the low 20s is a good number; with that size you can do anything. We have very little of what you would consider "support staff" and only two non-architects in the office. Everybody is directly responsible for the work of the firm, and integration into the studio is crucial. Everybody is involved at all different levels and everybody understands the trajectory of the projects. The studio acts as an organism. Working here is a good education; nothing is hidden and the staff can see what it actually takes to make a firm work. The people that work here are very committed.

What kind of breakdowns does your system inherently have? What are the breakdowns when it doesn't work? At times we'll continue to design beyond our fee. We try to pick our battles and become clear about where it makes sense to continue and where it doesn't. One of the hardest things you learn as an architect is what to accept and what to not accept. It's such a relationship negotiation, and knowing when to stop designing is a potential breakdown for people coming into the office who may not be familiar with the balance we have. As a designer, it's a personality mindset that determines how far you push people. We want to keep designing, but we have to have some kind of balance between time and money. At some point in a project, you can always stop designing, but that's no fun.

How do you manage the work-life balance of architecture? If you can't balance work and life, you either leave architecture or you end up doing a bad job. How you run a practice when you become older is very important; having kids is a paradigm shift. You just can't come home at 9 p.m. if you want to see your kids and spend time with them. If there's an issue at home, it's the most important issue.

How were you able to sustain the growth, and now, the larger staff that you have in down times? We know that we can survive in a down economy. Over the last two years, we've been busier than we've ever been. We've worked for institutions that have a certain amount of money set aside, and subsequently, the projects are independent of what the market is doing. The economic climate over the last two years has also offered our clients more construction value for their money.

How have you been able to take on new project types without previous experience regarding that type of work, like a museum, for instance? The client has to find the right qualities in you. With The Neurosciences Institute in La Jolla, we showed the client some houses and an art project that we designed prior to getting the project; based on that, the CEO wanted to work with us. You show your most interesting work because it shows *how* you work; it doesn't have to be relevant. It's also important to show images that people understand—images that communicate the feeling of a place. It allows people to respond emotionally to the work. You have to catch people emotionally or intellectually.

It's commonly remarked that NYC architects rarely get to work on anything in NYC, but you've had the opportunity to design some very nice projects just a walk away from your office. Well, we were in our late 40s and early 50s by the time we completed our first projects in NYC. They were smaller projects, but it gave us a chance to focus on the detailing.

Do you think it's more difficult to go out on your own as an architect in NYC than in other places? It's interesting that how you go into the practice varies depending on your location. I went to school at UCLA, and a lot of people I graduated with started building immediately after school. Starting your own firm while you're young is more of a West Coast phenomenon. On the West Coast the client base is younger; on the East Coast the client base is older and more established.

ABOVE: Tod Williams and Billie Tsien
PHOTO: Michael Moran

We try to pick our battles and become clear about where it makes sense to continue and where it doesn't. One of the hardest things you learn as an architect is what to accept and what to not accept.

It seems that you've positioned yourselves well for institutional work. I think so. I was at a dinner where graphic designer Michael Bierut was relating some advice given to him by Massimo Vignelli. Massimo told him that good work brings in good work, and bad work brings in bad work. Generally, we don't go after work that is speculative; those projects just need a different kind of architect, people that are more agile. We need to work with people who have values, recognize the longevity of buildings and want to make some contribution to the world or the place.

Do you pursue work, or does work pursue you? We're generally asked to be on lists for certain projects. But it's not as though people come to us and say, "We love you so much that we think you're the only firm for the job." I think when you do anything really well for somebody, word gets out whether it's interior, residential or institutional work. I think the whole issue of people being generally aware of your work is good, but being too easily found isn't necessarily the best scenario either. We don't actively scan for potential jobs, and we don't like competitions very much because we're not very good at them. We do best with interviews with potential clients.

When you're on the shortlist of a client who has sought you out, how does that process work? Generally, we have to go to the client (rather than meeting at our office), and it's usually the same architects being considered every time. Some architects have prepared drawings and models, and others have an incredible silver tongue. Now that we're more experienced, we don't actually think about who we're talking to. The conversation is more about being who we are rather than catering to each project. When we talk about our ideas, we can't talk about them in architectural terms. The ideas have to be presented in a way that makes them clear to someone who doesn't understand a building section. How do we talk about ideas in a way that people will understand? Tod and I are different people, and that works well because I feel that if people can't relate to one, they can relate to the other; the collaborations are healthy. The way we think about things is very, very different; Tod thinks about things three-dimensionally. I think much more in two dimensions.

Have you found that you don't want to share too much in the interview process because it's too easy for a potential client to form an immediate opinion? I think our work is more experiential rather than made up of cognizant images. We like potential clients to visit our work if we're seriously being considered. For us, design is more slow to come, more slow to develop. We also really believe that design comes from the process. Thom Mayne often comes into the initial interview with numerous physical models; and if that's what the client wants, then there's nothing you can do to change their mind.

Looking at this group of people that you're typically competing against, it sounds like you prefer the client to sit with you, face to face. Not all people want a designer like us; Tod would say that it's more important to know what projects to say no to. You say to yourself, life's too short; it helps direct your practice. You start to steer yourself and know what is or isn't right for you. It doesn't feel good to be rejected, but a lot of times it's okay—it's just not a fit.

You won the Barnes commission based on a narrative rather than drawings or models. Can you discuss that a bit? Our ideas were based on a simple diagram. When you visit the site, the existing program is a building set within a garden. When the new Barnes Collection moves to downtown Philadelphia, the garden is retained within the building; the gardens are brought into the galleries. Strict parameters of the program prevented us from changing the plans, so our idea was to spread the building apart and insert gardens and classrooms in between. The educational component of the Barnes Collection is also very important to us, and we want to retain it.

The decision of the Barnes Foundation to move the collection from suburban Pennsylvania to downtown Philadelphia has put TWBTA in a crossfire of controversy. Do you think an architect is required to take a political stance? Or are you able to draw a line in the sand and just concentrate on the architecture? The new location and program are carrying the educational mission to people who wouldn't be able to access it otherwise. The current location of the Barnes Collection has limited access; it's only a resource for people who have a car. I understand the specialness of a kind of house-museum that's tucked away; there are great places like the Wharton Esherick Studio, but that's much more idiosyncratic. If you look at this collection, it's one of the most important collections in the world. That it's been so hard to get to is a loss. The people who take classes at the existing location have mostly been from a retired, well-to-do demographic; I think it's good that the new location will open the collection up to more people—a more ethically and socially diverse audience. I think this is what Dr. Barnes would have wanted.

We understand that the restraints of the project were very detailed. There were six architects considered for the project, and we all had to agree to respect the organization of the existing building; the wall paintings would need to remain in their respective locations and the sequence of the galleries had to be "replicated."

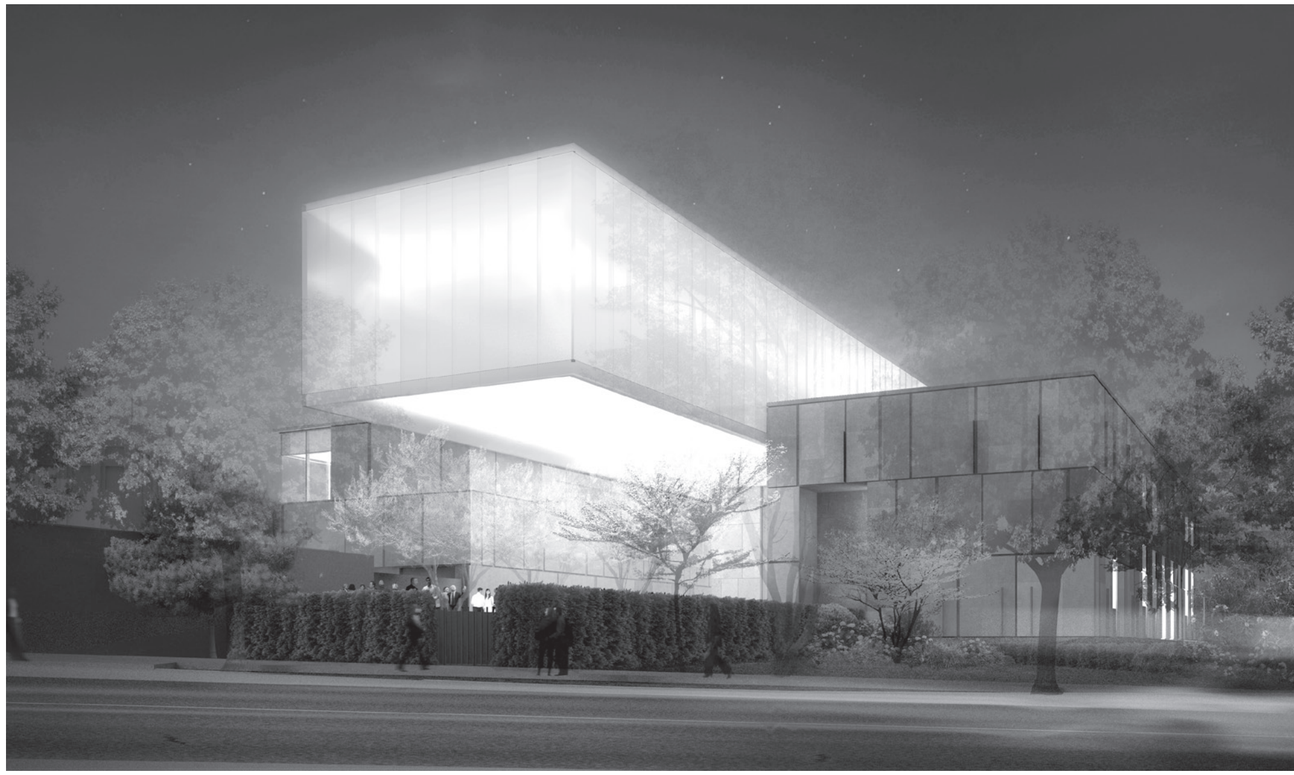
How is the design being received? The design of the new Barnes Foundation has weight and respect but, nonetheless, we're going to be trashed by some people who feel strongly that the museum should stay where it is.

I couldn't do it if I didn't believe in the projects that we take on.

So the design of the Barnes Collection put you in a classic situation of sorts; when should an architect act on an ethical opinion? I couldn't do it if I didn't believe in the projects that we take on. We recently said no to a large project in India because of some ethical differences we had; the project would be sucking up what little water is available to the community. There is a clear line for me. I deeply believe that Barnes' educational mission is fulfilled by moving the museum downtown.

There's quite a bit of coverage in the news about the American Folk Art Museum in New York; the institution is selling the facility designed by TWBTA to MOMA and moving into a different space. How has this affected you? Emotionally, it's very painful. We don't do that many buildings, and this one is so important to us. MOMA owns the site to the west, and the American Folk Art Museum is in the way of the development that Gerald Hines would like to do. If it's torn down, it will be very difficult. There were articles that said the architecture killed the building, but today's story is forgotten tomorrow. Architecture can only claim so much responsibility for the success or failure of an organization; there's also the institution.

In wrapping up, if you were us, would you have asked yourself anything else? Tod and I were talking the other day: Why are we doing what we do? And I guess that's a question that I would ask myself. People retire at a certain age—who would I be if I wasn't an architect? It becomes completely entwined with who you are as a human being.



ABOVE: Rendering of the west elevation of the Barnes Foundation, Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects.
IMAGE: The Barnes Foundation
OPPOSITE PAGE: American Folk Art Museum, NY, NY, Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architetcts.
PHOTO: Michael Moran

BILLIE TSIEN founded Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects with Tod Williams in 1986. Their work includes the American Folk Art Museum in New York, The Neurosciences Institute in La Jolla, California, Cranbrook Natatorium in Michigan and the new home for the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, which will open in the spring of 2012. With Tod, she has received the Cooper Hewitt National Design Award in Architecture, among many other honors. Billie serves on the board of the Public Art Fund, the Architectural League and the American Academy in Rome. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2007, she was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

BUILD llc is an industrious design-build firm in Seattle run by Kevin Eckert and Andrew van Leeuwen. BUILD llc's work focuses on permanence, sustainability and efficiency. BUILD llc maintains an architectural office, a furniture workshop and a development company, and is most known for their cultural leadership expressed in frequent posts on their BUILD blog. www.buildllc.com.

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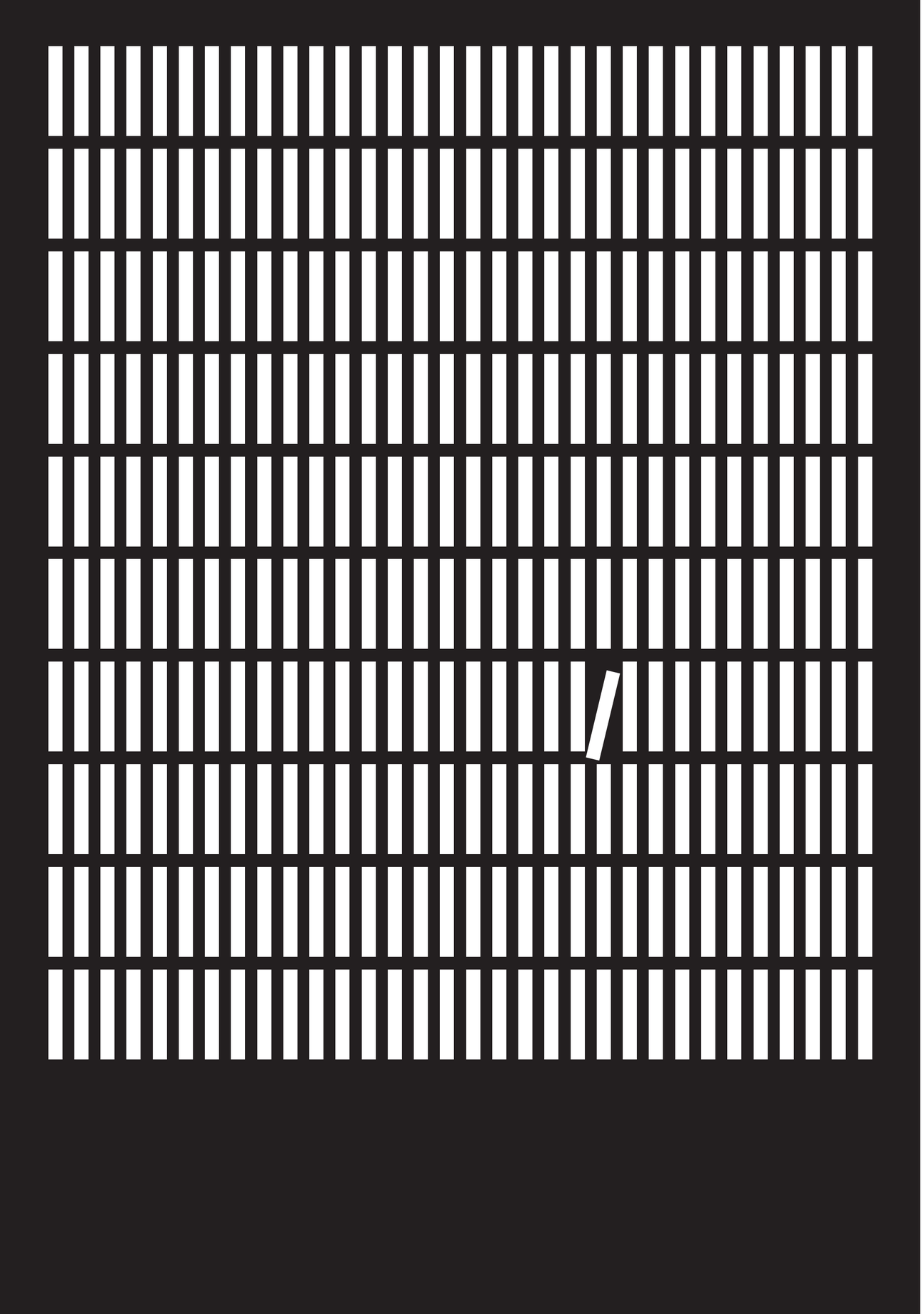


Risky

The Role of Risk in the Creative World

MARY & RAY JOHNSTON

This issue of *ARCADE* was originally conceived as the last in a series that loosely explores seemingly disparate forces that come together to make something unexpected. Our approach was to set up an opposition with piety, order, rules and, by implication, timidity on one side and rebellion, ambiguity, tension, uncertainty and bravery on the other.

We took a cue from the great outsider architect Bruce Goff. It has been noted that he sometimes achieved "dreadful results" because, like any great artist, he "was not afraid to fail." We found the phrase "not afraid to fail" exhilarating. Failure is scary territory and gets at the heart of what we seek to explore in this issue: the role of risk in creative pursuits.

To take risks is difficult right now. The design professions are weighted down with the contradictory tasks of building things while at the same time saving an environment that we have contributed mightily to degrading. Is the concept of rebellious, experimental design somehow immoral in this dire climate, or *must* we take risks, both technical and aesthetic, to overcome the forces that threaten to pull everything down?

The idea of experimentation and risk also goes straight to the question of the relevance of design, the role of emotion in architecture and the designer's obligation to reflect the complexity of modern life while creating responsible yet ambiguous and surprising results.

But risk is not exclusive to the design professions, nor is courage, innovation and revolt against the status quo. In inviting politicians, chefs, performers, educators and writers as well as urbanists, artists and architects to contribute to this issue of *ARCADE*, we hoped to get at the core of creative bravery, why it matters and why it's worth it. Our contributors have taken the concept to a broader, richer place, telling stories of emotional, financial, political and sometimes even physical risk. It turns out risk is personal. A vision emerges of two faces of risk: serious, calculated risk taken in order to reach a higher goal, and joyous, frivolous chances taken for the sheer thrill of it. Most of our contributors embrace one kind or the other, and sometimes, both. The common thread is the wholehearted endorsement of making the leap, taking the chance, going out on that limb, no matter what the motivation.

It is fitting that this is the last issue before *ARCADE's* 30th birthday celebration year. Thirty is mature, grown-up. Twenty-nine is dangerous.

MARY JOHNSTON, FAIA, is an architect in Seattle and co-founder of Johnston Architects. Mary is past chair of the Seattle Design Commission and an occasional guest lecturer at the University of Washington College of Built Environments.

RAY JOHNSTON is a founding partner of Johnston Architects. He has contributed to the built environment in Seattle and throughout the West for 30 years. Ray's other home is Twisp, Washington, where he chairs the board of directors of Twispworks, a PDA promoting education, sustainabiliy, economic vitality and arts and culture in a rural setting.

Kahn Burning

DANIEL S. FRIEDMAN

The fire that is not put out is a holy fire. – G.B. Shaw

The singular American architect Louis I. Kahn was born Leiser-Itze Schmuilowsky in Estonia, in 1901, where he spent his early childhood in the small village of Parnu. When he was three years old, something in the hearth caught Kahn's eye: "I remember I took the coals out of the fire and put them in my apron," he recalled. "They flared up. It was a heavy rug-like apron…It flared up and I tried to protect my eyes, which I did. My hands were burned, and my face." The accident disfigured Kahn's lower lip and chin.

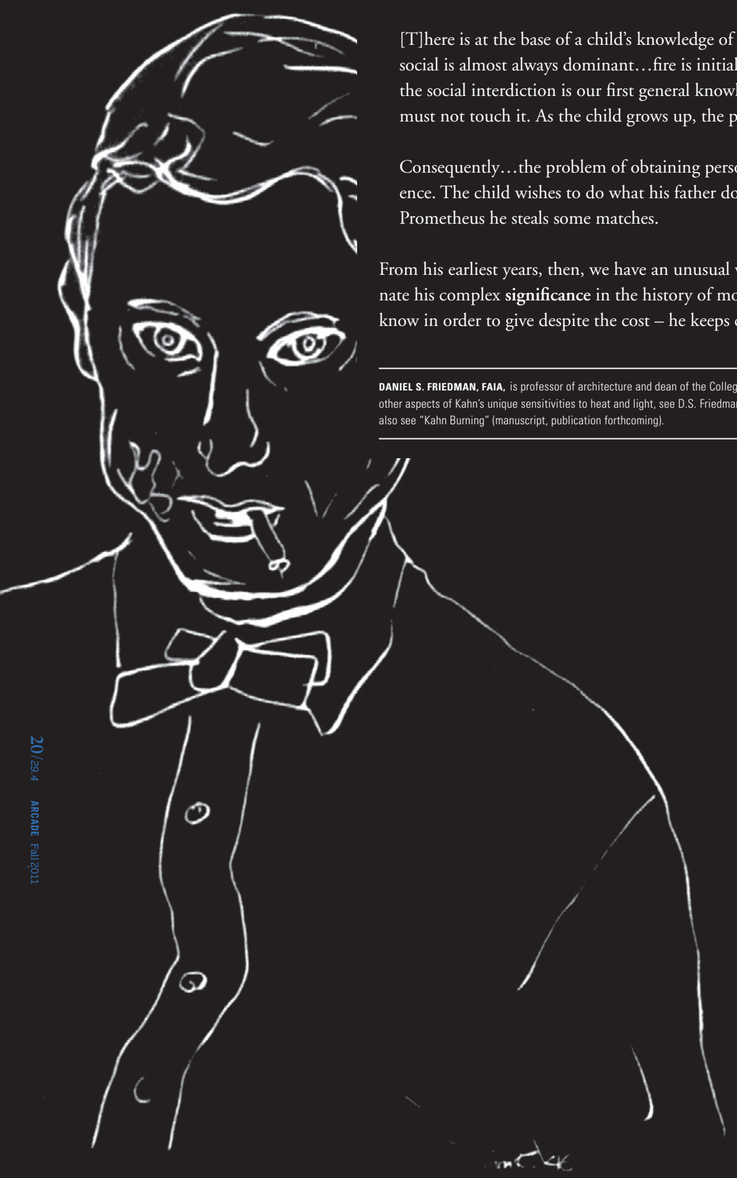
Historians have largely avoided or ignored the psychological effects of this accident, since any causal relationship between Kahn's injuries and his architecture rests on pure speculation. Why then theorize Kahn's burns? **Two reasons at least:** first, to help interpret the strangely compelling self-portraits Kahn produced between 1929 and 1949, during his formative years as an architect; second, to test Elaine Scarry's argument that one consequence of intense pain is its externalization into creative work, in particular as "fragments of world alteration."

In *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Gaston Bachelard argues that the poetic signification of fire rises out of fundamental social prohibitions:

> [T]here is at the base of a child's knowledge of fire an interaction of the natural and the social in which the social is almost always dominant…fire is initially the object of a general prohibition; hence this conclusion: the social interdiction is our first general knowledge of the fire. What we first learn about the fire is that we must not touch it. As the child grows up, the prohibitions become intellectual rather than physical…
>
> Consequently…the problem of obtaining personal knowledge of fire is the problem of clever disobedience. The child wishes to do what his father does, but far away from his father's presence, and so like a little Prometheus he steals some matches.

From his earliest years, then, we have an unusual window into Kahn's relation to risk, which may help illuminate his complex **significance** in the history of modern architecture. Like a little Prometheus – who seeks to know in order to give despite the cost – he keeps courting fire.

DANIEL S. FRIEDMAN, FAIA, is professor of architecture and dean of the College of Built Environments at the University of Washington. For the complete analysis of this and other aspects of Kahn's unique sensitivities to heat and light, see D.S. Friedman, *The Sun on Trial: Kahn's Gnostic Garden at Salk* (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1999); also see "Kahn Burning" (manuscript, publication forthcoming).



Self Portrait with a Cigarette, Philadelphia, 1946. From *The Paintings and Sketches of Louis I. Kahn,* Jan Hohstim.

Cooking Without a Net

JERRY TRAUNFELD

One morning in 2007, soon after returning from a culinary tour of India, the idea for a restaurant settled in my head. It was inspired by the thali—a round tray holding various small, individual dishes that work together as a complete meal. In the few weeks of my trip, I ate many. Some were simple lunches with dal, curry, rice, pickle and flat bread; others were elaborate dinners with nearly 20 separate items on one tray, all with bold and varied flavors that complemented and contrasted each other. A thali is meant for one person and eating it is an adventure at the table. That morning I thought about how much fun it would be to serve my own style of food on a thali, and all at once I decided I should open my own restaurant, and that this restaurant would be named after my mother, Poppy, and I that I would leave The Herbfarm after 17 years of heading its kitchen.

Until the day this idea came to me, I was never driven to open my own place. I held a job most chefs fantasized about, and I knew too many other chefs whose quality of life was diminished by the day-to-day grind of restaurant ownership. But if I was ever going to do this, the time was right. As far as I could tell, there were no other restaurants in North America doing anything like it, and here was an opportunity to make my mark with something truly original.

It was this excitement of designing a new dining experience that motivated me more than anything. The small plate phenomenon had been going on for some time, as diners were eager to sample many things on a menu rather than a traditional appetizer and entrée, but there were several things that bothered me about the trend. First, most diners share the plates and pass them around the table, and at a table of more than two, it leaves everyone with a bite or two of this or that. And who gets the last bite? Secondly, when you order a selection of these small plates, they don't always make sense together or feel satisfying as a meal. The thali would be different. It would allow me to conceive a balanced array of dishes that are meant to go together, and best of all, you would have them all to yourself.

The opportunity to create the environment also excited me. Even though the serving style is Indian, my inspiration for the interior was Scandinavian. I grew up in a house of Danish modern furniture and wanted to draw from that sensibility, pairing modern design with warm materials and practicality. I hired Seattle's Kerf design, who custom designed the chairs and cabinetry, and we hung le Klint lamps, tektum as a wall covering and a mobile at the kitchen's entrance. We dotted the room with orange circles representing a poppy and used the circle in our menu design.

Traditional thalis are most often served on stainless steel trays holding stainless cups. Mine needed to be warm and modern. I gathered all the small dishes I could find, avoiding the white dishes every other restaurant seemed to be choosing, and began mixing and matching to come up with an anodized aluminum tray (a pizza pan) of Heath Ceramic's bowls and ramekins mixed with miniature Japanese dishes, along with a few other small-scale odds and ends.

I was already taking a huge risk by opening a restaurant of any sort; we all know they often fail. Opening one with a completely new concept multiplied the risk. I had to invent everything from the ground up. I had no idea how to get things rolling, how things would run once the doors opened or how the public would react.

Honestly, I brushed thoughts of failure out of my mind. I had to believe this was going to work and convince everyone around me it was a great idea. I opened about 18 months later.

The first year was tough, especially the first few months. We had little time to train staff before opening, and we were packed every night. Opening a restaurant is a process, and it takes time to fine tune, especially when there is no template to work from.

The criticism hit me hard. With online rating sites and blogs, you hear everything, and the negative comments got under my skin. Many customers loved what we were doing, but others were resistant. They were used to dining a certain way and were confused by a meal set in front of them all at once in a bunch of little dishes. They wanted to know what order to eat things in and wanted instructions. Some would eat their soup and salad first and be annoyed because other food became cold. Some were expecting Indian food. I was questioned again and again if I was planning to stick with the concept. And the economy kept getting worse.

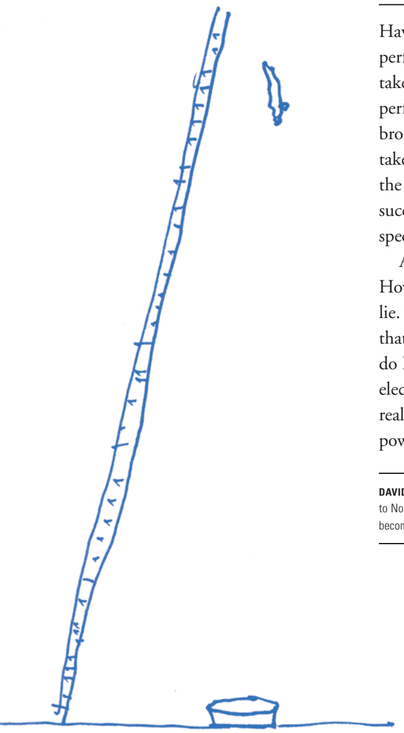
I toughed it out. As time passed we found our customers—the folks who got what we were doing and were delighted by it. We became part of the neighborhood. We listened to feedback and tweaked everything. Service became more polished and the cooks found their groove.

It's been nearly three years, and we are still serving thalis. Our seats are filled every night. Our guests love the varieties of tastes set in front of them. I still haven't heard of any other non-Indian restaurants opening that serve thalis, but if another chef follows my lead, it will make me happy. I'll know then I've left a mark.

JERRY TRAUNFELD is a chef in Seattle. He is the owner of Poppy Restaurant and the former executive chef at The Herbfarm Restaurant in Woodinville, WA. In 2000, Jerry received the James Beard Award for "Best American Chef, Northwest and Hawaii." He is the author or two cookbooks, *The Herbfarm Cookbook* and *The Herbal Kitchen.*

Flop Sweat

DAVID SILVERMAN



Having been a stage performer for over 30 years, I can safely say the subject of risk is at the heart of the live performance experience. The audience enters a space, risking their money and time (and maybe self-respect) to take part in what? They don't know. Sure, we all think we know what will happen, but the very nature of live performance means that anything is possible. To wit, in my own career I have been on stage when fires have broken out, earthquakes have shaken, the power has gone out and any number of medical emergencies have taken place. The interesting thing is that I guarantee every witness to these various events remembers them—the nights were special and unique. The fact that musicals that everyone has agreed are dreadful can be hugely successful speaks to this—people want to see what will happen. *Spider-Man* on Broadway has moved into that special place, the Indy 500 of shows: Will there be a crash?

As a stand-up comedian, risk is the name of my game. How far can I push one idea? How long can I pause? How much can I milk a laugh? Comedians constantly test themselves and the audience to see where the limits lie. In theater and stand-up, the feedback is instant, the rewards intoxicating and the flop sweat intense. Now that I am a charity auctioneer, I find the same basic tenets apply. How far can I push two bidders? How much do I cajole, caress and harass? The inherent risk is a beautiful thing—it supplies an underlying tension that is electric and felt by all. Will someone dare another $100, $500, $5,000? Will they risk losing an item that they really want? For me, the wonder, challenge and excitement is fascinating to see and provides a heady sense of power, which is, well, another subject.

DAVID SILVERMAN has entertained people as an actor, stand-up comedian, singer, dancer, choreographer, director and emcee throughout his 37-year career. A familiar face to Northwest audiences on both stage and television, David has appeared in *A Chorus Line, Angry Housewives, Rumors, Stellaluna* and *The Velveteen Rabbit.* David has also become one of the most sought after charity auctioneers in the Seattle area.

Considering Shapes of Avoidance on the Landscape

CHUCK WOLFE

This historic photograph was plastered on the side of a building in Alberabello, Puglia, Italy. Original photographer unknown.

The form of urban settlements and appearance of constituent structures reflects underlying culture and regulation. In times of change, buildings, landscapes and objects transform to reflect the impact of new or modified policies or regulations. And the resulting shapes of compliance – such as the patterns of height, bulk and density dictated by a new downtown zoning code – can potentially reinvent the urban landscape.

Conversely, in response to regulation, the urban landscape can also be dramatically altered to reflect a contrasting city form collectively composed of "shapes of avoidance." Consider, in the context of everyday urbanism, those shapes and patterns dictated by focused avoidance of regulation.

I am not only referencing spontaneous "parklets" or sidewalk dining tables of "guerrilla urbanism" or "pop-up" cities, but urban forms that result when policy or regulation is creatively defied on a widespread basis. Call it the urban landscape's manifestation of French American microbiologist René Dubos' classic discourses on remarkable and unpredictable human adaptation to environmental change, *Man Adapting* and *So Human an Animal.*

A compelling historical example is the alteration of a southern Italian landscape in the 15th to 17th centuries premised on the avoidance of taxes or fees – the apparent explanation for the unique shape of *trulli* houses in the province of Puglia – and the resulting appearance of the Itria Valley and the town of Alberobello. As the story goes, conical houses that don't look like houses were built without mortar for easy destruction so the Counts of Conversano could avoid property tax payments to the King of Naples on permanent structures (such as residences).

What are today's *trulli*? Are they merely a list of un-enforced zoning violations (e.g. unpermitted home occupations, illegal accessory dwellings, unsanctioned tent cities, vehicles on lawns) or perpetual temporary uses?

Given the extent of land use regulation today, could spontaneous, repetitive *trulli*-like "shapes of avoidance" define a sustainable urban landscape more interesting than those that are planned? Or are the most visible "shapes of avoidance" now limited to freedom of expression in the ballot box and on urban walls?

After all, some might argue that graffiti and the recent electoral landscape are the *trulli* of our times.

CHUCK WOLFE is an attorney in Seattle where he focuses on land use and environmental law and permitting. He is also an Affiliate Associate Professor in the College of Built Environments at the University of Washington, and contributes regularly on urban development topics for several publications including *The Huffington Post, seattlepi.com,* and *Crosscut.com.* He blogs regularly at *myurbanist.com.*

Danger in the Middle Ground

MIKE McGINN

Imagine two futures. One is a stagnant economy, rising income inequality, declining health of individuals and the dire consequences of global warming. And communities in which everyone's just looking out for themselves.

Now imagine a different future. One where innovation, education and intention provide opportunity, build new ways of doing business, widen the circle of prosperity and squarely confront our pressing environmental problems.

That's the choice we face right now. If we continue our current course and speed, we know we're going to get the first future. Because that's the present we're living today. Between these two futures lies a chasm. A chasm of history, fear, obstructionism and worst of all, entrenched power.

So how do you get to the other side? It's not by trying to figure out the middle point of everyone's position. Because if you do that, you only leap halfway across the chasm and fail entirely. Instead, we have to find the collective will to jump all the way across.

From education, to housing, to transportation, to economic development, every action we take has to be measured against the question, "Will it help us get to the other side of the chasm? Or will it only take us halfway?"

MIKE McGINN is the Mayor of Seattle.

So You Want To Change the World?
A Conversation with Alex Steffen

MARY JOHNSTON

A leading voice on sustainability, social innovation and planetary futurism, Alex Steffen was Executive Editor of Worldchanging.com after he co-founded the organization in 2003 until 2010. A writer, public speaker and strategic consultant, he has spoken and keynoted at the most renowned design and innovation conferences in the world, including TED, Picnic, Pop!Tech, Design Indaba, South by Southwest Interactive and Doors of Perception, as well as at some of the world's leading universities, including Harvard, Yale and Stanford.

MARY JOHNSTON For this issue of *ARCADE*, we are looking at taking risks – aesthetic, technical, political, social and cultural – in order to reach some higher place. It strikes me that this theme has been the essence of your career so far. Is that a valid assessment?

ALEX STEFFEN At the most basic level, I'm interested in the question, "How can we make ourselves into good ancestors?" How do we build a good life that increases the options of the generations to come? At the very least we should seek to do no irreversible harm.

We're sort of the opposite of good ancestors today. There may have never been a way of life more dangerous to the future than that of contemporary North America, and there may never have been a generation more destructive than the one now in power. When people reach a certain age, they are thought to embrace the long view, so it's a paradox that while perhaps two-thirds of those who have ever reached age 65 are alive today, we have never had a shorter planning horizon or less discussion of our duties toward future generations. On a regular basis we do things that we *know* will impoverish the choices of our descendants, perhaps in utterly catastrophic ways. As Paul Hawken says, "We have an economy where we steal the future, sell it in the present and call it GDP."

At the same time, as hidden costs mount and strain the system, our economy and society grow increasingly unstable. The world is undergoing wrenching transformations brought on by huge population growth, urbanization, globalization and accelerating technological innovation. We're hitting resource limits and ecological boundaries, and there's not a major industry out there that doesn't have respected leaders delivering somber warnings about the depth of our unsustainability. All sorts of systems we depend on are being transformed at a scope, scale and speed humanity has never seen, and we're doing essentially nothing to prepare for the impacts. What we think of as "normal" is already a thing of the past, but we're struggling mightily to hide that fact from ourselves so we can keep the money flowing a little longer. We are the brittle rich.

If the planetary reality we face today isn't risky, I can't imagine what is.

MJ Yes, these are dangerous times, but I know you also believe in being optimistic, and I like your statement that "cynicism is obedience." One of the assertions we make in this issue is that orthodoxy and a too-strict adherence to rules produces at the very least bland, and at the worst, destructive results. Could you discuss how rebelliousness and optimism work together in a constructive way?

AS The absolute highest priority for most large corporations (and the insanely rich people who hold their stocks) is to avoid substantial change. We have legions of lobbyists, PR flacks, think tank mercenaries and bought politicians whose major task every day is to stymie change just a little longer. Think about the climate "debate," which has been over scientifically for decades but is continued politically by people paid to keep up a campaign of fear, uncertainty and denial.

These people (and their employers) couldn't care less if we're cynical about them and their motives. In fact, they tend to drench the public debate in the politics of disgust because it makes their jobs easier; cynicism makes it difficult to see virtues in new approaches and isolates us from one another. They want us to believe in nothing, do nothing and demand nothing. Cynicism is obedience to their wishes.

In today's politics, especially in the United States, the most independent stance is pragmatic optimism. Nothing drives the opponents of change into a greater frenzy than simply being unwilling to accept their definition of "realism." The working possibilities in front of us – the array of solutions and new models we know have already proven practical and successful in various places around the world – and range of debate inside the Beltway (or in Olympia, for that matter) are so far apart that the only option left is a sort of relentlessly confrontational optimism grounded in facts and good examples.

Change is coming. That's inevitable. Indeed, we're entering an age where increasing rewards (in economic competitiveness, resilience to disaster and quality of life) will accrue for cities with a sense of bold optimism and willingness to transform, while cities slower to change will find themselves pouring money into operating outdated systems with sunk costs and vulnerable to weather chaos, energy turbulence and social conflict. We want to have as many of the former and as few of the latter as possible. The best way to do that is to help cities re-envision their own possibilities. That can both throw the tenuous nature of the status quo into sharp relief and help illuminate pathways forward. Since we can't build what we can't imagine, helping people envision positive realistic futures is eminently practical.

MJ Speaking of building, your online magazine *Worldchanging* divides content into three categories that specifically refer to the built environment – Stuff, Shelter and Cities – but the others – Community, Business, Politics and Planet – are related, of course. Designers of all types – industrial designers, architects, landscape architects and urban designers – are all feeling the pressure to address so many issues holistically now. On the surface, this seems like a good thing, but are we in danger of losing some very specific and valuable expertise in exchange for a bunch of generalists? Is there a risk that we all will see everything the same way and eventually no progress can be made?

AS No. I don't think that's a risk. It's true that architecture, design and engineering carry enormous (though in my opinion appropriate) burdens of expectation these days. It's also true that every designer does need to be a systems thinker now. Nothing we design, engineer or build is exempt from the demand to work within our urban and natural systems to help create pretty massive shifts toward sustainability as soon as possible. We live in a world in which refusing to make our duty to the future a central concern of our work isn't a creative choice—it's a moral and imaginative failure.

With that said, though, I think there is risk in not seeing how many different perspectives it takes to really wrestle with these systems. I mean, they're so huge and complex. We need the inventiveness of all the disciplines just to see the problems clearly; and since every good solution is unique (though probably reflects good work done elsewhere), we're going to need teams of people embracing their inspirations and their individual histories, really making use of their particular tools and strengths, to find good answers to the problems we face. And interestingly enough, being forced to design to the same constant global constraints may greatly multiply the diversity of approaches we take to solving problems.

The real risk we take here in Seattle, I think, is that we've allowed, and are continuing to allow, the city to become actively hostile to innovation in the built environment. This ought to be a period of wild creativity, but there's not actually much excitement here. Young people, especially, aren't attempting bold things because they're hemmed in by poverty, out-dated codes, neighborhood NIMBYs, a dicey job-market, the fear of getting black-balled, the risk of lawsuits, the lack of research funding, change-averse financial institutions, the opposition of status quo politicians...the list goes on. It's as if our entire city is swimming in thickening molasses.

Cities that, in times of change, make experimentation extremely slow and difficult are putting themselves at extreme risk. The safest thing Seattle could do would be to embrace creative chaos and grapple with a whole landscape of new approaches. What I see happening instead, again and again, is much of the most interesting young talent in the city continuing to pack their bags and head for places they think will actually support their work. We're driving away the next generation. That fact should be howling like an air-raid siren over our streets and buildings.

MJ Embracing creative chaos sounds fun. In fact, you talk about a new paradigm of fulfillment in life, or maybe it's an old paradigm of family, friends, meaningful work, security and fun. All good things. But that sort of assumes some homogeneity of values. What if someone else's idea of fun consumes a lot of resources? How does this message overcome the "elitist" label, and how does democracy accommodate this notion?

AS Democracy is a balance between rights and the responsibility to respect others' rights. Many things people once thought of as their property rights we've learned to see differently: You can't own another person as a slave, bait a bear with hunting dogs in a pit or dump your raw sewage in the street. I think nearly all of us would agree that, in hindsight, losses incurred by slave-owners, dog-fighters and public hygiene skeptics were far outweighed by the benefits to society gained when their practices ceased (I'd bet slaves, bears and cholera victims particularly agreed).

Now we're at a moment when we have to take seriously our responsibilities both to our neighbors (wherever they may live on the planet) and to the rights of future generations. If that means people with particularly wasteful lifestyles find those lifestyles dramatically more expensive (or even find certain options no longer available), well, that's unfortunate for them but part of progress. Times change.

MJ Lastly, what's the riskiest thing you've done, aside from challenging conventional wisdom (or maybe it's really that)? Running with the bulls? Driving at night in the desert with your headlights off?

AS I was a particularly risk-oblivious young man. I did a lot of stupid stuff, often with the best of intentions. The scars and scandals are numerous. Indeed, I take as a sort of personal motto the rhetorical question, "What could possibly go wrong?" But that's a story for another time.

ALEX STEFFEN makes regular speaking appearances to influential audiences and at leading companies such as Weiden + Kennedy, Nike, Amazon, Ideo, Arup, Nau, Steelcase, Carrier, Yahoo!, the World Travel and Tourism Council and the Danish Industries Bright Green trade show during COP-15. You can follow Alex on Twitter at @AlexSteffen. www.alexsteffen.com.

The Necessity of the Unexpected

CHRISTOPHER HAAS

People want to be surprised by the unexpected. As an architect who crosses into the realms of performance and installation work, this has become very clear to me. Designing architecture that has the capacity for the unexpected is not at all "rebellious" or "risky," but an overlooked necessity within our built environment.

Partnering with renowned choreographer Alonzo King and Grammy-award winning musician Mickey Hart, I recently had the unique experience of creating a collaborative ballet, which explores the intersections of architecture and movement. In the ballet, *Triangle of the Squinches,* instead of static backdrops, all the "sets" have various unexpected kinetic characteristics. The ballet partners the dancers with transformable architectural surroundings, providing the performers with the unique opportunity to explore, play, manipulate and transform their environment, creating and defining new spatial relationships simultaneously.

The architectural objects are designed to record the physicality and impact of the dancers pushing on or pulling against them by shape shifting, rebounding, deforming and reconfiguring themselves. Like the human body, these same architectural "bodies" have the ability to resist and subvert their partners' moves, forcing the dancers to adjust their movements and mood to their imposed physical environment. By engaging one another in a direct partnership, the architectural elements and the dancers begin to explore and reveal the body's often unapparent, conflicting and desired relationships with architectural surroundings.

For eight evenings I sat in a packed theater of 800 attendees and listened to the gasps, the "oohs" and "ahhs" of the audience reacting to the unexpected changing forms and use of the sets as the dancers climbed, shifted, re-shaped, folded, mounted and concealed themselves within and upon the architectural objects. At moments, the sets seemed weightless; at other times they seemed to weigh thousands of pounds. Sometimes they appeared solid or dense, only to be revealed as thin and delicate. After every show, audience members came up to me and asked how things were done, built, moved, what materials were used and how I found them…People are curious and yes, they want to be surprised by things around them.

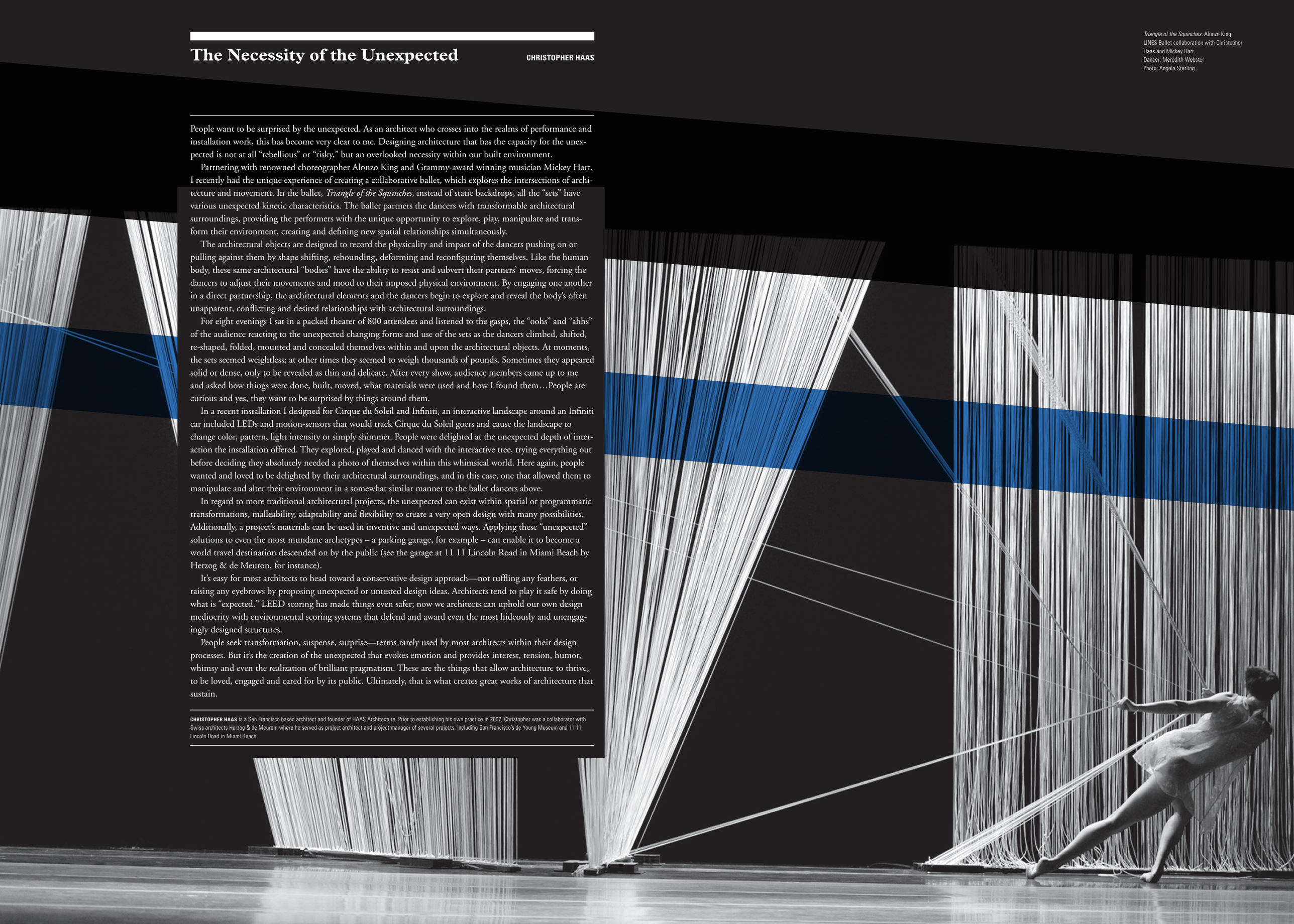
In a recent installation I designed for Cirque du Soleil and Infiniti, an interactive landscape around an Infiniti car included LEDs and motion-sensors that would track Cirque du Soleil goers and cause the landscape to change color, pattern, light intensity or simply shimmer. People were delighted at the unexpected depth of interaction the installation offered. They explored, played and danced with the interactive tree, trying everything out before deciding they absolutely needed a photo of themselves within this whimsical world. Here again, people wanted and loved to be delighted by their architectural surroundings, and in this case, one that allowed them to manipulate and alter their environment in a somewhat similar manner to the ballet dancers above.

In regard to more traditional architectural projects, the unexpected can exist within spatial or programmatic transformations, malleability, adaptability and flexibility to create a very open design with many possibilities. Additionally, a project's materials can be used in inventive and unexpected ways. Applying these "unexpected" solutions to even the most mundane archetypes – a parking garage, for example – can enable it to become a world travel destination descended on by the public (see the garage at 11 11 Lincoln Road in Miami Beach by Herzog & de Meuron, for instance).

It's easy for most architects to head toward a conservative design approach—not ruffling any feathers, or raising any eyebrows by proposing unexpected or untested design ideas. Architects tend to play it safe by doing what is "expected." LEED scoring has made things even safer; now we architects can uphold our own design mediocrity with environmental scoring systems that defend and award even the most hideously and unengagingly designed structures.

People seek transformation, suspense, surprise—terms rarely used by most architects within their design processes. But it's the creation of the unexpected that evokes emotion and provides interest, tension, humor, whimsy and even the realization of brilliant pragmatism. These are the things that allow architecture to thrive, to be loved, engaged and cared for by its public. Ultimately, that is what creates great works of architecture that sustain.

CHRISTOPHER HAAS is a San Francisco based architect and founder of HAAS Architecture. Prior to establishing his own practice in 2007, Christopher was a collaborator with Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron, where he served as project architect and project manager of several projects, including San Francisco's de Young Museum and 11 11 Lincoln Road in Miami Beach.



Triangle of the Squinches. Alonzo King LINES Ballet collaboration with Christopher Haas and Mickey Hart.
Dancer: Meredith Webster
Photo: Angela Sterling

Cinéma Vérité

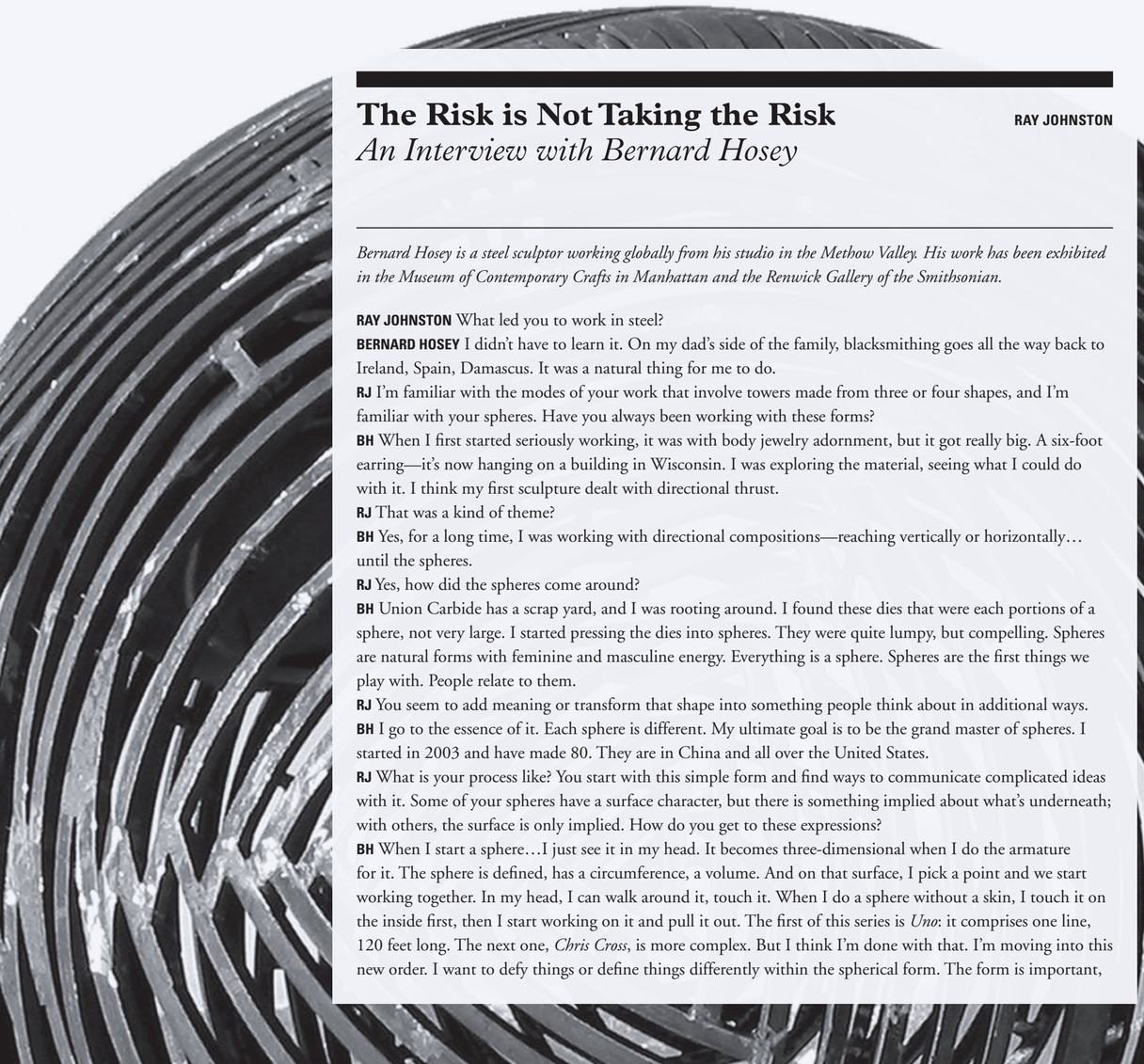
LYNN SHELTON

The experience of making my first feature film, *We Go Way Back*, was enormously satisfying and utterly life changing. But for my second outing, I wanted to stray into uncharted waters, leaving behind the traditional way of making movies and trying an experiment instead. I would eject as many pieces of equipment from the set as possible and reduce the crew from fifty to four. Instead of working from a traditional script, I would allow the actors to improvise their lines from an eight-page outline. I wanted to treat narrative film as a documentary in the hopes of achieving an aesthetic of extreme realism.

Two weeks before the shoot, I had a total panic attack. What the hell was I doing? Who did I think I was? Would an actual film result from these efforts? I hadn't a clue. But I realized that great art is not possible without great risk. And I created this soothing mantra for myself: "No matter what happens in the end, we are going to have a fabulous time in the trying." Then, I made absolutely sure that we did. And I have made absolutely sure of it on every film project since.

LYNN SHELTON'S first feature as a writer/director, *We Go Way Back*, won the Grand Jury Prize at the Slamdance festival in 2006. *My Effortless Brilliance* won the Someone to Watch award at the Independent Spirit Awards in 2009, which was the same year *Humpday* was awarded a Special Jury Prize at Sundance. *$5 Cover Seattle*, a web series Lynn developed for MTV, can currently be viewed on mtv.com, and her fourth feature film, *Your Sister's Sister*, will soon premier worldwide.

Scene from *My Effortless Brilliance*.
Photo: Elie Goral



The Risk is Not Taking the Risk

An Interview with Bernard Hosey

RAY JOHNSTON

Bernard Hosey is a steel sculptor working globally from his studio in the Methow Valley. His work has been exhibited in the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in Manhattan and the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian.

RAY JOHNSTON What led you to work in steel?

BERNARD HOSEY I didn't have to learn it. On my dad's side of the family, blacksmithing goes all the way back to Ireland, Spain, Damascus. It was a natural thing for me to do.

RJ I'm familiar with the modes of your work that involve towers made from three or four shapes, and I'm familiar with your spheres. Have you always been working with these forms?

BH When I first started seriously working, it was with body jewelry adornment, but it got really big. A six-foot earring—it's now hanging on a building in Wisconsin. I was exploring the material, seeing what I could do with it. I think my first sculpture dealt with directional thrust.

RJ That was a kind of theme?

BH Yes, for a long time, I was working with directional compositions—reaching vertically or horizontally… until the spheres.

RJ Yes, how did the spheres come around?

BH Union Carbide has a scrap yard, and I was rooting around. I found these dies that were each portions of a sphere, not very large. I started pressing the dies into spheres. They were quite lumpy, but compelling. Spheres are natural forms with feminine and masculine energy. Everything is a sphere. Spheres are the first things we play with. People relate to them.

RJ You seem to add meaning or transform that shape into something people think about in additional ways.

BH I go to the essence of it. Each sphere is different. My ultimate goal is to be the grand master of spheres. I started in 2003 and have made 80. They are in China and all over the United States.

RJ What is your process like? You start with this simple form and find ways to communicate complicated ideas with it. Some of your spheres have a surface character, but there is something implied about what's underneath; with others, the surface is only implied. How do you get to these expressions?

BH When I start a sphere…I just see it in my head. It becomes three-dimensional when I do the armature for it. The sphere is defined, has a circumference, a volume. And on that surface, I pick a point and we start working together. In my head, I can walk around it, touch it. When I do a sphere without a skin, I touch it on the inside first, then I start working on it and pull it out. The first of this series is *Uno*: it comprises one line, 120 feet long. The next one, *Chris Cross*, is more complex. But I think I'm done with that. I'm moving into this new order. I want to defy things or define things differently within the spherical form. The form is important, but the energy is in pulling it apart, something deeper, strong, not just this visual hit…like defying gravity. So now I am defying gravity.

RJ You felt compelled to shift away from the single line spheres that imply a surface—you felt done with that?

BH Yeah, it died. Literally, I just slammed against a wall and couldn't work anymore. I was tired. I had been in China for three months and came back and went into my studio and nothing was happening. Usually, when I finish a series, I get bored. This time I was more than bored, I was empty. It might have been the first time I'd felt that way. I guess the writers call it writer's block—not an uncommon thing. But my artistic life just ended. I had to bring it back, give it a new life. So, I did.

I had three days of heavy duty frustration that turned into anger. I couldn't pull anything out. So I started working with the sculpture marking the entry of the town of Twisp. That was number one, the first in a series; in the second version I started playing with the Twisp Sign ideas as a reference point. I took it one more step and then started to deconstruct it, taking the energy and breaking it down, moving it around. This sequence led to a two-piece sculpture, the first time I had done that. I pulled the two pieces apart and discovered a new kind of dynamic in the work. There was a relationship between the two pieces that had all kinds of energy.

So, I was OK then, I wasn't dead any more, I had climbed over the wall. At that point I was ready to go back into the spheres. I started laying up lines and laying up lines, a complete sphere or an implied sphere, then I started adding these blocks hanging in there and then I rotated it all and the base was no longer a base. It changed, it came together.

RJ So as you were coming out of that period, there were new elements to your work. At any point did you feel a sense of risk? That you might be going down a dead end?

BH No, I don't look at things that way. It's not a risk to go anywhere. It's a danger not to go there. I didn't have a plan in the first place: Mistakes are learning experiences, they are not wrong, especially for emerging artists who can make a lot out of scrap. My work is just an evolving thing: There is no fear. The risk lies in walking away from it all.

RJ This is a kind of risk I hadn't thought of: Even more so than blowing it, denying the opportunity to blow it is unacceptable.

BH That's the essence. That's the toughness. That would be a nightmare—not having the opportunity to explore. That's like quitting and going fishing. People do that. I don't know how they do it. I don't want to go there. You pursue all kinds of things that are important, building a 747 example, and then you don't have a 747 to build anymore. Maybe then it's time to give your knowledge away in a loving manner.

RJ And now, you are exploring this direction where gravity is unhinged?

BH Yes. I asked for the first version to be returned, which I had sent to China. I am thinking I can play with light, color, form and then, arrested motion in one piece. They are getting really complex. They are suspended. Something is happening and it stops in progress. It defies time.

BERNARD HOSEY was born in Canada in 1948 and moved to the United States in 1965. Currently, Bernard is working on a volumetric collection based on the sphere.

Photo: Bernard Hosey

Creating Art from Logic

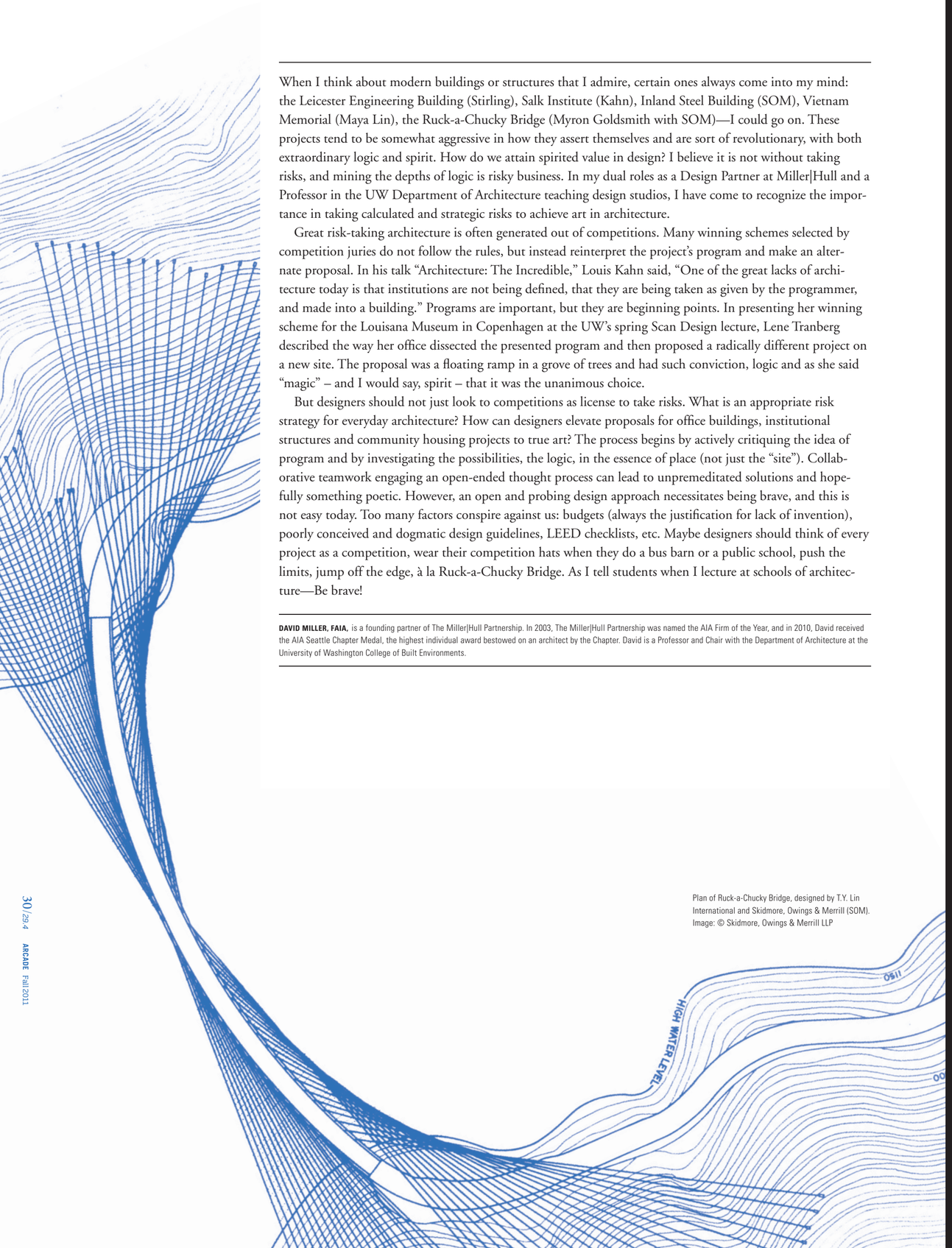
DAVID MILLER

When I think about modern buildings or structures that I admire, certain ones always come into my mind: the Leicester Engineering Building (Stirling), Salk Institute (Kahn), Inland Steel Building (SOM), Vietnam Memorial (Maya Lin), the Ruck-a-Chucky Bridge (Myron Goldsmith with SOM)—I could go on. These projects tend to be somewhat aggressive in how they assert themselves and are sort of revolutionary, with both extraordinary logic and spirit. How do we attain spirited value in design? I believe it is not without taking risks, and mining the depths of logic is risky business. In my dual roles as a Design Partner at Miller|Hull and a Professor in the UW Department of Architecture teaching design studios, I have come to recognize the importance in taking calculated and strategic risks to achieve art in architecture.

Great risk-taking architecture is often generated out of competitions. Many winning schemes selected by competition juries do not follow the rules, but instead reinterpret the project's program and make an alternate proposal. In his talk "Architecture: The Incredible," Louis Kahn said, "One of the great lacks of architecture today is that institutions are not being defined, that they are being taken as given by the programmer, and made into a building." Programs are important, but they are beginning points. In presenting her winning scheme for the Louisana Museum in Copenhagen at the UW's spring Scan Design lecture, Lene Tranberg described the way her office dissected the presented program and then proposed a radically different project on a new site. The proposal was a floating ramp in a grove of trees and had such conviction, logic and as she said "magic" – and I would say, spirit – that it was the unanimous choice.

But designers should not just look to competitions as license to take risks. What is an appropriate risk strategy for everyday architecture? How can designers elevate proposals for office buildings, institutional structures and community housing projects to true art? The process begins by actively critiquing the idea of program and by investigating the possibilities, the logic, in the essence of place (not just the "site"). Collaborative teamwork engaging an open-ended thought process can lead to unpremeditated solutions and hopefully something poetic. However, an open and probing design approach necessitates being brave, and this is not easy today. Too many factors conspire against us: budgets (always the justification for lack of invention), poorly conceived and dogmatic design guidelines, LEED checklists, etc. Maybe designers should think of every project as a competition, wear their competition hats when they do a bus barn or a public school, push the limits, jump off the edge, à la Ruck-a-Chucky Bridge. As I tell students when I lecture at schools of architecture—Be brave!

DAVID MILLER, FAIA, is a founding partner of The Miller|Hull Partnership. In 2003, The Miller|Hull Partnership was named the AIA Firm of the Year, and in 2010, David received the AIA Seattle Chapter Medal, the highest individual award bestowed on an architect by the Chapter. David is a Professor and Chair with the Department of Architecture at the University of Washington College of Built Environments.



Plan of Ruck-a-Chucky Bridge, designed by T.Y. Lin International and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM). Image: © Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP

Secret City

ALLISON NARVER

When I was a kid, I loved to break into buildings—schools, churches or ideally, big, empty, industrial spaces. Alone or with my grubby pal Molly, we'd scale walls, get on roofs of buildings and discover every aspect of these places that we possibly could. We never did damage, never caused harm, but instead relished in the unique poetry that exists when you tug on a door that hasn't recently been opened and let yourself into a forbidden zone—a found space.

During these escapades I was often at great physical risk—climbing rickety, old fire escapes hundreds of feet up the sides of buildings, getting guns pulled on me by security guards, being chased off properties by German Shepherds and being arrested for trespassing were prices I paid for the thrill of pulling open slightly stuck doors leading to newly discovered, long forgotten worlds.

The joy of that entry process, as well as its inherent risks, always changed my relationship to a space. The way light found itself into the room became a revelation; the history of the building and its previous occupants became a series of tantalizing mysteries. I have always been fascinated by both the visible and invisible walls in our city, those made of hidden histories and taboos. The concealed story of a city also manifests itself through the lack of clarity about what happened at certain places and the initial purpose of particular buildings. This poverty of cogent information is glorious for an artist—it's where the real storytelling can begin.

As a theater director, I love to try to re-create the sense of risk, wonder and joy found when discovering a forbidden, abandoned, empty or unused space. When directing, I always want the theater audience to encounter the stage the way I've always encountered these spaces—that is, to feel they've entered a place filled with secrets, that the space could have sat empty for 20 years or been vacated quickly before their arrival, a world that feels palpable, mysterious and filled with endless ways of encountering and interpreting our environment.

In my production of *Eurydice* at a contemporary theater in Seattle, the seemingly oppositional ideas of "lost/found," "remembering/forgetting," "life/death," "above/below," "drop/catch," and "light /dark" created the emotional landscape. As we approached the project, the design team and I worked to create a world that could both hold and heighten these contradictions. This was a place that needed to feel familiar and strange, joyful and melancholy—somewhere that could simultaneously contain the land of the living and the land of the dead. We were reminded throughout our process that often the deepest truths emerge from these seemingly contradictory impulses.

We decided to set our production in an abandoned swimming pool (very much based on an old swimming pool that I had recently discovered in Pittsburgh). A broken diving board and trash littered the floor—the trash was actually handbills of missing persons and letters that people had written to loved ones. The swimming pool felt right because it could be both the romantic world of Orpheus and Eurydice as well as the Underworld. It could also hold such oppositional feelings as great joy and great sorrow.

Characters arrived in the Underworld via an elevator that rained (a stand-in for the river Styx). Once in the Underworld, Eurydice re-connects with her dead father. He builds her a 3-dimensional house made from string found on the swimming pool floor. Periodically, letters from Orpheus (desperately searching for Eurydice throughout much of the play) would come flying through the space. Orpheus was on a grid about 150 feet above the audience and would push the letters through the grating. After Eurydice's death and subsequent arrival in the Underworld, I wanted to create a sense that Orpheus was "above ground" searching for her while the rest of us were in the Underworld.

In all the work I do, I want my audiences to feel that they are the first to encounter a previously empty or abandoned space. In this way, I feel that they experience a uniquely personal connection to the world of the play and, as a result, a much deeper relationship to its story, ideas and characters. Ideally, in the process, my audience becomes a group of conspirators standing with me (just as my friend Molly did), ready to trespass on forbidden property while creating and recreating the stories of our time.

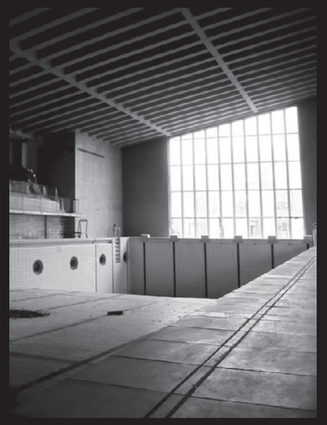


Photo: Allison Narver

ALLISON NARVER is an award winning theater director based in Seattle. She has served as Artistic Director of the Empty Space Theater and Annex Theater, both in Seattle, and the Yale Cabaret at Yale University.

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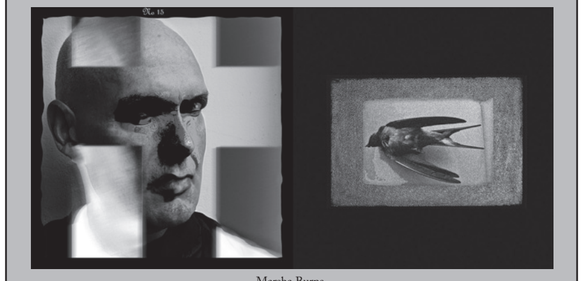
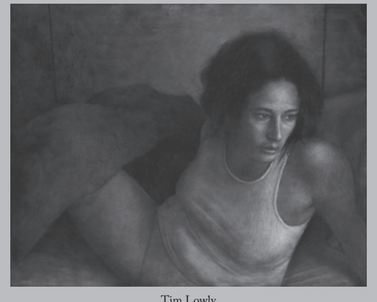


Marsha Burns



Tim Lowly

Norman Lundin in association with Francine Seders presents exhibitions of contemporary drawing, photography and other fine work on paper

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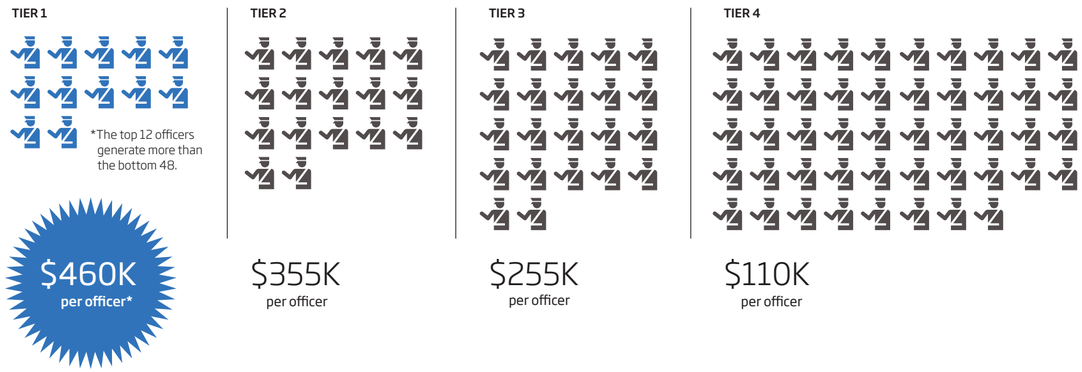
Don't Even Think of Parking Here

Infographics and analysis by **SERGEI LARIONOV**, graduate student at the University of Washington in Interaction Design, and **KAREN CHENG**, Associate Professor of Visual Communication Design at the University of Washington.
Mapping assistance provided by **MATT DUNBAR**, GIS Specialist at the UW Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology.
2010 Seattle Parking Data provided by the **CITY OF SEATTLE POLICE DEPARTMENT PUBLIC REQUEST UNIT.**

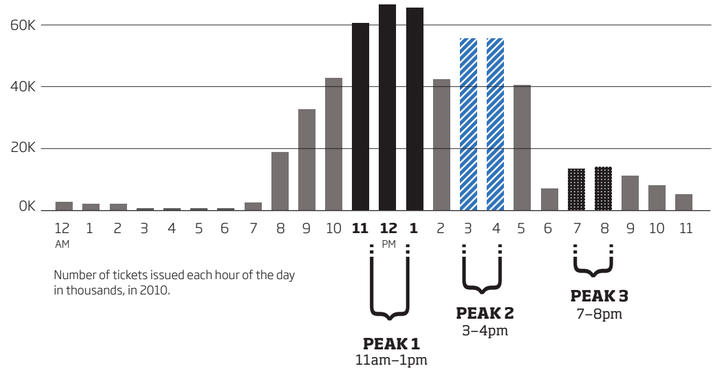
1 There are 98 parking officers

In 2010, the average Seattle parking officer generated $230K in ticket revenue.
The average salary of a 2010 Seattle parking officer was $42K.

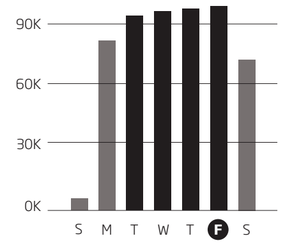


2 The schedule is 24 / 7

Most tickets occur during lunchtime (11am–1pm), followed by 3–4pm and 7–8pm.
Mid-week (Wednesday through Friday) is slightly more active than other days of the week.



Number of tickets issued each hour of the day in thousands, in 2010.

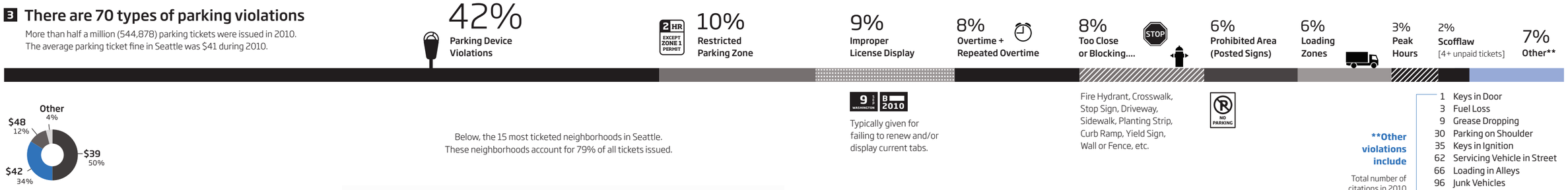


Average number of tickets per weekday, in thousands, in 2010.

JULY 2010 had the most [50K] tickets.
NOVEMBER 2010 had the least [37K] tickets.

3 There are 70 types of parking violations

More than half a million (544,878) parking tickets were issued in 2010.
The average parking ticket fine in Seattle was $41 during 2010.



9 WASHINGTON B 2010

Typically given for failing to renew and/or display current tabs.

Fire Hydrant, Crosswalk, Stop Sign, Driveway, Sidewalk, Planting Strip, Curb Ramp, Yield Sign, Wall or Fence, etc.

NO PARKING

****Other violations include**

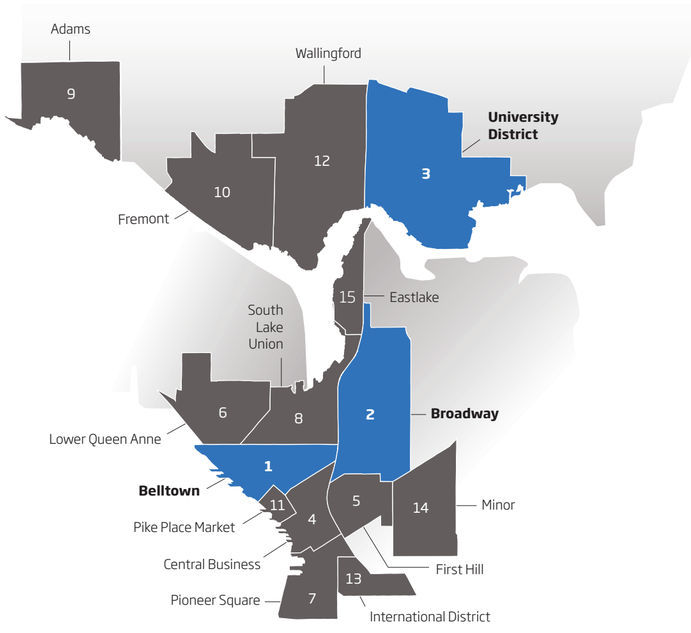
Total number of citations in 2010

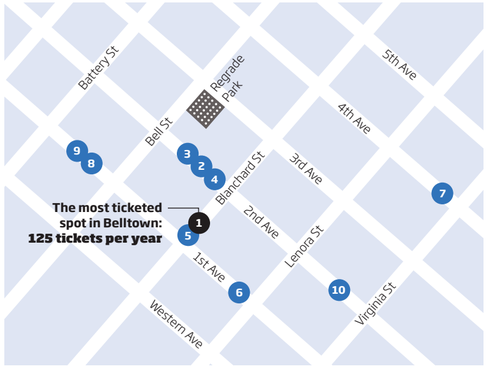
1	Keys in Door
3	Fuel Loss
9	Grease Dropping
30	Parking on Shoulder
35	Keys in Ignition
62	Servicing Vehicle in Street
66	Loading in Alleys
96	Junk Vehicles
188	Parked in Park
387	Double-Parked
859	Moving to Avoid Time Limit

4 One ticket is issued per minute

In 2010, Seattle parking ticket fines totalled more than $22 million.

Below, the 15 most ticketed neighborhoods in Seattle.
These neighborhoods account for 79% of all tickets issued.





BELLTOWN: These top 10 spots range from 69–125 tickets per year.

HOT SPOTS

The most ticketed spot in Seattle during 2010 was in Capitol Hill.
The 2nd and 3rd most frequent spots were in the University District.

4 660 NE Northlake Way (not shown on map)

BROADWAY: These top 10 spots range from 179–711 tickets per year.

U-DISTRICT: These top 10 spots range from 142–542 tickets per year.

(Curving) Lines of Thought

A BING THOM SAMPLER

Trevor Boddy

The Vancouver architecture practice of Bing Thom has over the past two years received the highest possible accolades from its Canadian colleagues: the 2010 Royal Architectural Institute of Canada's award for top architectural firm, and in 2011, the R.A.I.C. Gold Medal went to Thom personally for his lifetime of achievement in design. The reason for this attention is that in an architectural landscape that rewards bland competency over creative innovation, the works of Bing Thom stand out. Bing Thom's work is unpredictable, and in times when public and campus architecture evermore resemble beltway branch offices, predictability reigns king. While large corporate firms reliably deliver the high-end of generically urbane and green public building commissions, Bing Thom gets the strange but wonderful work—or more accurately, he makes it strange and wonderful.

> While large corporate firms reliably deliver the high-end of generically urbane and green public building commissions, Bing Thom gets the strange but wonderful work–or more accurately, he makes it strange and wonderful.

For instance, take the Thom-designed Surrey Central City, where a suburban campus for 4,000 students is laminated on top of an extant 1970s shopping centre that never closed its doors, topped by an office tower and fronted by a transit-related plaza—in all, a key demonstration of the hybridity in typologies, building programs, social missions and materiality that is the hallmark of Vancouverism. Surrey Central City was made possible by pushing wood engineering to do things never seen before, courtesy of Thom's ongoing creative collaboration with Canada's most innovative engineers, Fast + Epp. More recently, Thom did a campus plan for Calgary's Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, where the only component constructed to date, a mere parking garage, is alive with innovative ideas.

Failures are often more indicative of qualities in individuals – even design firms – than are successes, so two of Bing Thom's seeming failures (both, as it happens, in Toronto) are worth discussing to understand the commitment to ideas and innovation that underlies Thom's designs. Working for Arthur Erickson, Bing Thom took over as project architect for Toronto's Roy Thomson Hall after predecessor Jim Strasman resigned to strike out on his own, tiring of how Erickson ran his atelier. The concert hall had been designed from the inside out, and independent of a specific site, because many potential locations for the building were still in play. The acoustics consultant, Bolt Baranek Newman, had already been chosen (their other designs of the era, such as San Francisco's Davies Hall, would prove to be as vexed as the Toronto concert hall).

Thom's challenge was to site the building once the locale at King and Simcoe was secured (considered "out-there" at the time) and to give it exterior form. Erickson and Strasman had elaborated a variation on the office's typical repertoire of cast concrete post and beam for the seating tiers and their soffits. Thom broke radically with this for its exterior shell, applying his knowledge of complex glass construction gained with the Law Courts/Robson Square, where he was team leader. The resulting sweeping, ovoid roof is that rare figural object (along with Revell's City Hall) that stands out against downtown Toronto's boxy ground, and the first indication of Thom's now career-long interest in curving building forms. But the boldness of Thom's forms in an architecturally conservative city, plus the ill-received acoustics for the concert hall, gave Roy Thomson Hall little acclaim or resonance. But less than a decade later, Thom's steep learning curve was applied to a second concert hall commission, this time for the University of British Columbia, designed after he left Erickson. A clear design and acoustic triumph, the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts has become one of the world's most influential performing arts buildings of the past two decades. The same design trajectory then continued on to shape the Arena Stage complex in Washington, almost certainly the most-lauded American building completed last year. It is the mark of a truly great architect to learn from failures, then innovate, and there have been few more prominent such progressions than Bing Thom's turn from Roy Thomson Hall to Chan Theatre to Arena Stage.

Bing Thom can also be seen to have won by having lost in the sad tale of the Royal Ontario Museum addition. Thom called me in for advice right after he learned that he was to be, strangely, the only Canadian among the 20 firms invited to submit credentials for the commission. After congratulating him, I bluntly opined that he did not have a chance, and neither did 18 of the other usual international suspects who formed the list. My advice sprung from a previous chat with my first editor, William Thorsell (who had left the newspaper business to become CEO of the ROM), after he returned, starry-eyed, from a preview viewing of the Berlin Jewish Museum designed by Daniel Libeskind (also on the ROM's list of potential architects). "Do it to raise your Toronto profile," I suggested to Bing, "but whatever you do, don't drop a pile of unpaid staff time into a commission you cannot win." Of course, Thom ignored my advice, threw his whole team into every aspect of the commission and came close to winning it—study his phase II competition plan treatment of collections and public spaces and weep when comparing them with Libeskind's off-the-shelf metaphysical muddle that got built.

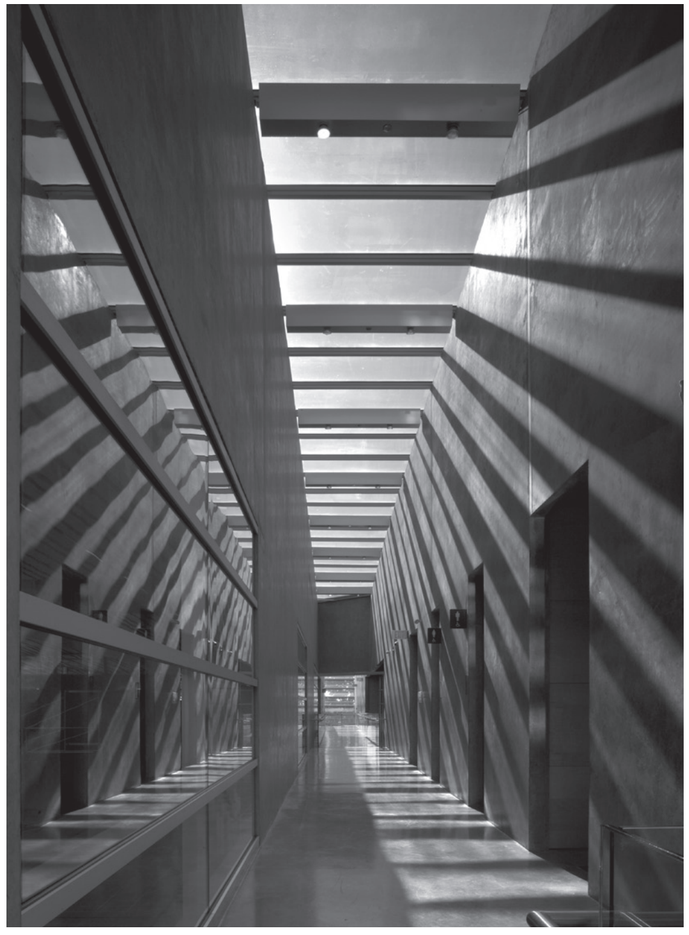
Thom's Toronto lessons were hard—the bland competency of the cities' leading practitioners sparks an equal and opposite market for the faux-heroic gesture, ergo Libeskind, Wil Alsop's Sharp Centre at the Ontario College of Art and Design, even the re-working of the Dundas façade on the Art Gallery of Ontario by Frank Gehry. As yet, Canada's largest city has found no niche for Thom's commitment to formal and technical invention driven by disciplines of (hybrid) urbanity, (hybrid) social graciousness, and (hybrid) tectonics; in other words, there's been no room in the urban closet for anything but carefully tailored suits or carnival costumes.

Many of these same patterns – a commitment to technical and programmatic innovation, a sinuous formal repertoire, un-conventional but apt urbanism – are apparent in one of Canada's most under-published but innovative buildings of the past few years, BTA's Sunset Community Centre, created for a park on Vancouver's south Main Street, near the Punjabi Market. Weddings in the Punjab crucially include a parade of bride and groom around the village or neighbourhood, and local families were forced to book wedding halls in Surrey, 25 kilometres away, because there was no adequate facility nearby. A large room on Main Street was Thom's key addition to the standard recreation-related program for Vancouver community centres (the half-century string of these buildings are one of our city's under-sung marvels of social integration and healthy living). Established pedestrian pathways across the park site informed Sunset's crossed pair of internal streets, which double as avenues for wedding processions on even the rainiest of days. Thom's favoured organic forms are evident here (perhaps the reason the project has not received the profile it deserves) and are rationalized by him as being inspired by the flowing forms of silk saris, drifting above the park's greensward on a summer evening. BTA has long been a green firm without defaulting to the recent sustainability look *New Yorker* critic David Owen calls "LEED Style." Green features include an investment in geothermal heating, unusually well-disposed and controlled day-lighting and a refreshing concern for the energy content of materials and energy expended during construction. Drawing on the expertise of Fast + Epp, the latter concerns led BTA to revive the 1950s intermediate technology of tilt-up concrete construction at a scale seldom attempted in Canada. Sunset's internal streets are framed by tilt-up walls, their pours superior to nearly all local conventional cast-in-place concrete and much cheaper and less consumptive of energy and materials.

The key to Thom's tack in all of these projects is found in the forces that have influenced his life and his dedication to ideas and originality that has set his course through them. A rare 1950s immigrant from Hong Kong, the diminutive Thom scrapped his way through an otherwise all-white Westside Vancouver high school, his parents refusing more Asian enclaves further east. Thom started working for Erickson as an office assistant before even starting architecture school, and having had a similar start, I know the wonderful overview of practice that is possible then, before the templates and received wisdoms of a formal education. By the time Thom graduated from UBC, he was a thriving force in Erickson's office and was afforded the rare privilege of a theoretical, not practical, architecture school thesis. He turned down Ivy League graduate schools to go to Berkeley; he was attracted by the combinatorial thinking of *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*-era Christopher Alexander, but repulsed by the emergent Pattern Language cult there, and focused instead on urban design and systems theory. He and wife Bonnie backpacked through China in 1972, and Thom turned down an opportunity to work for Louis Kahn but accepted one to work for Fumihiko Maki.

There is no figure in contemporary Canadian architecture who has so deftly inherited Arthur Erickson's double dedication to formal and tectonic innovation – true modernism, not the fey Neo-Modernism that is thought by too many to be the same thing – combined with a commitment to civic commentary and social engagement. Why he remains a mystery to so many clients and colleagues in Canada is a mystery to me, but Bing Thom has sorely earned his accolade.

OPPOSITE & RIGHT: Sunset Community Center, Vancouver, BC Canada, Bing Thom Architects. **PHOTOS:** Nic Lehoux, Courtesy of Bing Thom Architects



TREVOR BODDY is a Vancouver architecture critic and curator. He hopes to arrange a 2013–14 North American tour of *Vancouverism: Architecture Builds the City.*

4 CULTURE

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Designed around a one ton repurposed impellor from the facility, Don Fels' *Water Plant* brings playful attention to the way water works. The base, or sepal, is made up of a series of ten connected equilateral triangles that form a truncated icosahedron, Plato's solid for water.

© Donald Fels, *Water Plant*, 2010, stainless steel and found objects
Photo by YaM Brand

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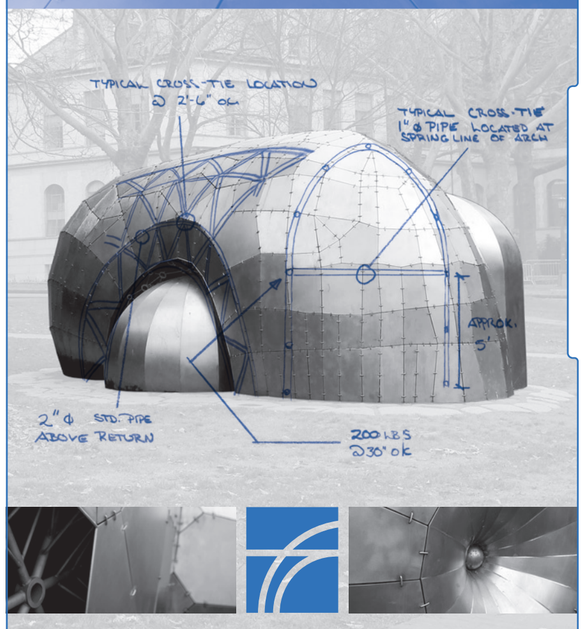

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Barbara Swift

The Place de Vosges

AN URBAN MARVEL FOUR CENTURIES LATER

PHOTOS: Barbara Swift

With a small bag of macaroons and chocolates in hand, we walk down the center of Ile St. Louis and turn north onto the Pont Marie crossing the Seine. A soft, fall breeze touches the water's surface, and the leaves on the allees of Plane trees dance. We are walking though Paris, a city made for walking. We have been wandering all day and are making a slow arch back through the Marais toward the L'Ambassade d' Auvergne, where the food makes you moan in ecstasy.

We've never seen the Place de Vosges, but it has embedded itself in our mental map of the city, and for some unknown reason we walk slowly through back streets, past schools and their walls leaking sounds of children playing, moving constantly toward the square. Vines cover the walls and cobbles cover the streets. Ahead is the Pavilion du Roi, the south gateway to the square we are seeking.

As he brought the French Wars of Religion to a close, King Henry IV of Navarre entered Paris in March 1594 with the conviction that the city would become the new Rome. Thus began his remarkable impact on the city's planning. With the Place de Vosges, we can experience King Henry's use of the Roman model of the *place royale* ("royal square" or piazza). He defined the design and layout and created what is still a stunningly cohesive urban environment, and upon completion, the Place de Vosges quickly transformed into a desired urban square dominated by aristocracy. Co-funded using his own money to spark development, the king dictated the use of the distinctive white stone and red brick, uniform building heights, a consistent building line on the street and building regulations. The result is a remarkable example of urban life four centuries later.

We walk through the two-story Pavilion du Roi and enter the pedestrian colonnade wrapping the remarkably simple open square. We are stunned—this is perfection, this requires a coffee and time to observe. On an almost north-south axis, the square is about 460 square feet, a space that is typically too large to feel personal. Despite its size, the Place de Vosges is intimate, humane and minimal. Its success is due to a careful relationship of scale, materials, layers, use and context.

We walk through the two-story Pavilion du Roi and enter the pedestrian colonnade wrapping the remarkably simple open square. We are stunned–this is perfection.

The surrounding buildings are approximately 70- to 90-feet tall—not too high but tall enough to frame the square. An inhabited public arcade and a 60-foot road with two lanes of parking wraps the central square. On the inside edge of the road is a tall, elegant wrought iron fence wrapping a double allee of small deciduous trees. Inside the double allee, the square is divided into four quadrants with a central grove of immense Beech trees, whose height is equal to the surrounding ring of buildings. The larger square is bisected with wide crushed granite walks. Each quadrant is approximately 1/3 of the larger square and is subdivided by the wrapping allee, a crushed granite promenade and lawn with a fountain. This is a study in thirds—each incrementally subdividing the square in interlocking forms to create a human scale where you can recognize a face and you can understand the larger whole.

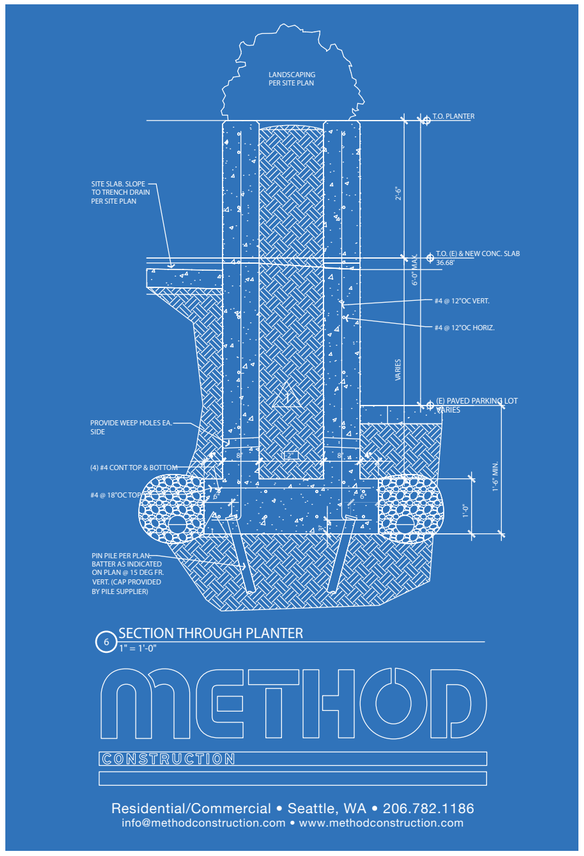
The design of the square is extraordinarily simple but well made and used. The ground plane is largely level, quietly lifting 3–4 feet to the central grove—an archetypal move which places the sacred grove on high ground. The ground's surface is racked gravel or lawn. Vertical elements include trees, seating (lots of it), beautiful, clean trash containers, four fountains and most importantly, people.

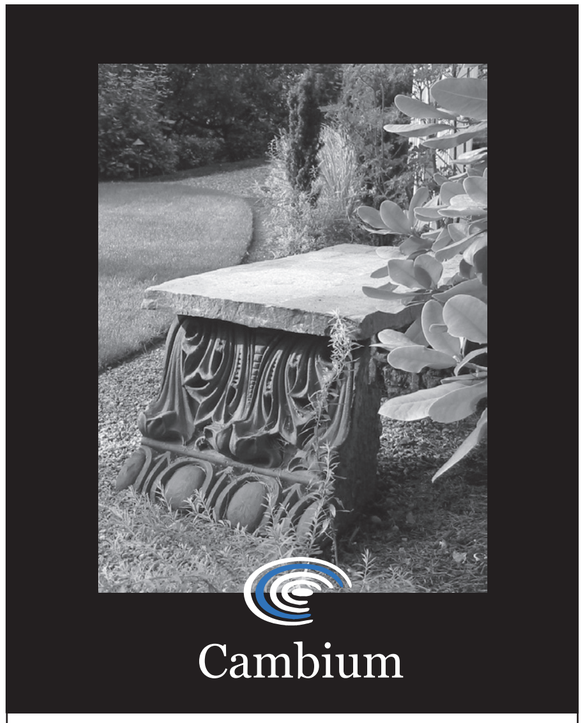
The Place de Vosges is without the standard, single-use recreational element we find in American squares or parks. Instead, the area is structured to accommodate multiple groups of people doing various things throughout the day. Everyone owns a little bit of the space and no one dominates. Individuals read, perambulate and people watch. Small groups play and talk. Simple is better.

Here, simple civil cohabitation thrives. To be fair, the Place de Vosges succeeds because of density and a history of urban living; the typical Parisian spends significant parts of his or her day in the public realm. At the square, we count twelve places to stop and linger; we pause and are able to participate in this urban experience.

The afternoon is passing, and with regret, we slowly walk through the square under the canopy of the magnificent, primal, central Beech grove. The autumn sun reflects off the walls. The trees are gold, as is the ground littered with their leaves—spots of light on granite gravel and green lawn. We will return.

BARBARA SWIFT is the founding member of Swift Company llc and writes and lectures on urban issues.





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Don Ewing

Housing Choice & Cultural Inertia

ABOVE: Kalkin House (Bunny Lane House), Bernardsville, NJ, Adam Kalkin. **PHOTO:** © Peter Aaron / Esto

I doubt anyone in the construction and design industries has experienced a time when cost reduction was not a current topic. No matter what the cost baseline, a general upward bias persists over time.

In the housing realm, the attempts at cost reduction focus on things like new product forms that promise to do the same or better for less money, or the search for the building team that is fast, talented and inexpensive, or factory-built housing. Some cost reduction is possible, but in the US houses do much more than provide shelter. Homes confer status, indicate social group affiliation, and contain in their furnishings and art objects clues to how we want to see the world and ourselves. Houses, as they become homes, exhibit a high level of symbolism. Derived from our culture, existing symbolic definitions of the home bias our selection of form, size, materials and spaces. Cultural preferences change relatively slowly, and the average 40–50 year life of residential structures creates a visual persistence of form that tends to reinforce existing biases. This creates inertia.

What housing ideals do we as a culture embrace in the US? We like our separate houses. In fact, we love choice and the prospect of having things customized. With this, how can we reduce housing costs in general? Choosing smaller houses is the most powerful lever, followed by long-life durability. If we as a culture could be persuaded to "want" factory produced housing with these characteristics, and we could ditch our bias for single-family homes and prefer multifamily residences, a path is revealed. Redefining any symbol, particularly that of the American "home" is difficult—and who is going first?

Multifamily dwellings allow the leverage of repetition and that gives automation a shot at significant cost reduction. As variation is wrung out of products, the potential for cost reduction mounts. In this case, where the building product fits the tools of manufacturing, choice and variation get pushed back and large savings can accrue.

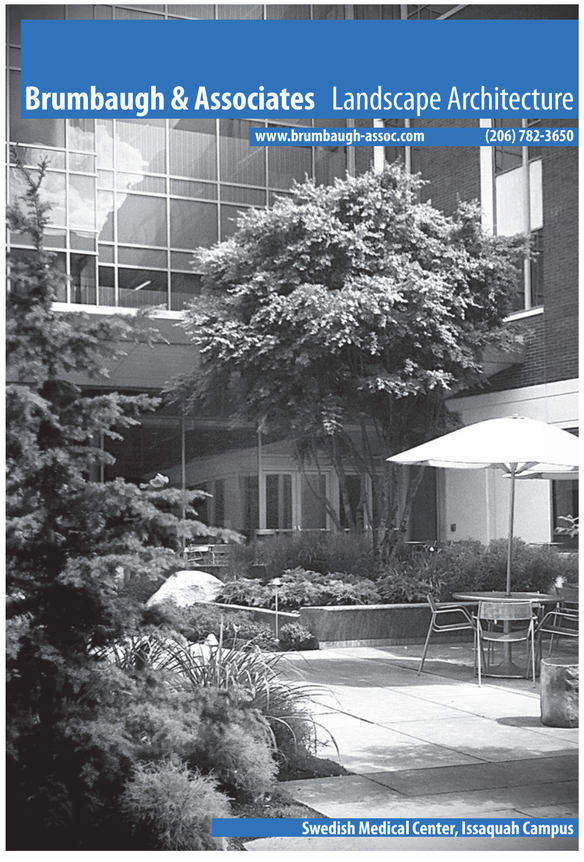
Multifamily housing benefits dramatically from factory production. In spite of that, considerable talent in design and production has been expended over many years on the high-design, single-family part of the problem, but sadly, most efforts have ultimately been realized as merely custom homes built inside a parent building. Houses are not useful to dwellers without plots of land to rest on, and the number of potential owners who have the means and luck to procure land is always very small. Ratios of land to structure value are very high in urban areas, which makes the financial challenge daunting for the urban homeowner. Heavily capitalized, highly-regarded companies such as Skanska and DR Horton are able to provide turnkey housing in a move-in state, and selling the idea of factory-built housing to these companies, not the enthusiast public, is the way forward for factory production. For these companies, the industry is a marketplace, and they will adjust their operations accordingly if they are convinced factory-built housing is in their financial interests. They remain agnostic to delivery methods and choose based on overall return.

> Homes confer status, indicate social group affiliation, and contain in their furnishings and art objects clues to how we want to see the world and ourselves.

Cultural preferences will work against people's selection of more modest factory housing, and the specter of the '57 Nashua trailer house lurks in the background. Factory housing does not generally provide the correct ground for transmitting favorable and useful symbolic material when compared to the incumbent housing stock.

As it stands, the building industry has numerous solutions available to construct dwellings very cheaply that most of us don't want to live in. When the process is modified to get closer to what we do want, the advantages are diluted. The cost difference becomes so small that it is difficult to confidently attribute the savings to factory building and create any dependable measurement. This coupled with cultural predilections brings enough risk into the equation to steer most people back to conventional methods. In the end, we can affect construction cost at a detail level and make some gains in value engineering, hope inflation goes our way, redesign and many other tweaks. Embedded cultural preferences remain at the center of the question and are beyond our reach.

DON EWING is the owner of the construction company The Albion Group llc.



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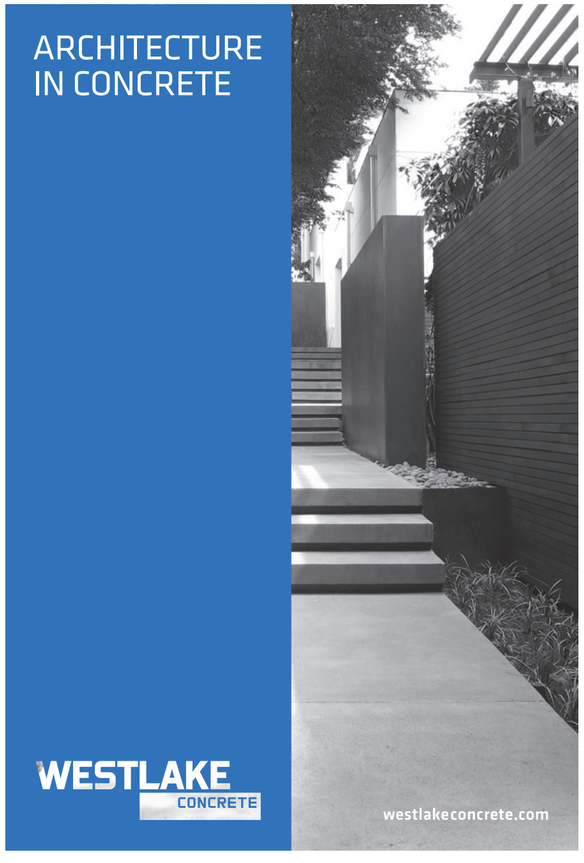

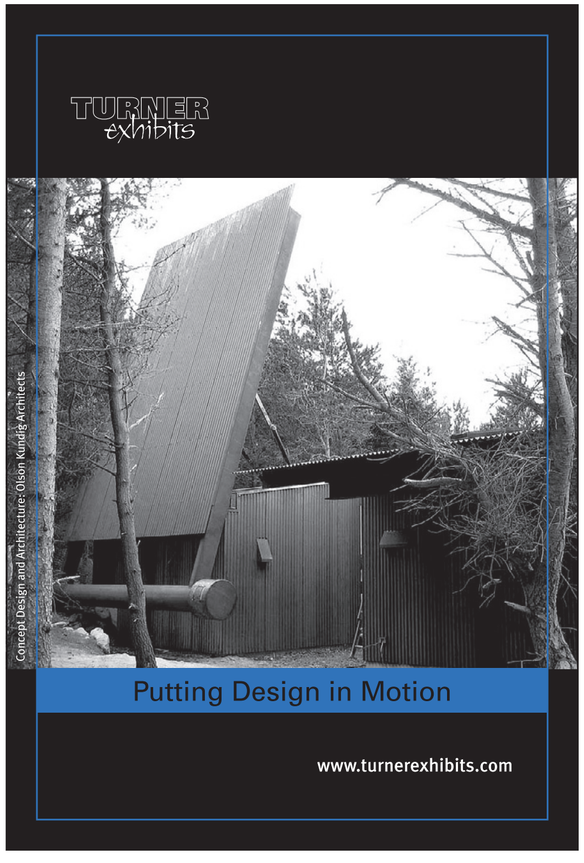

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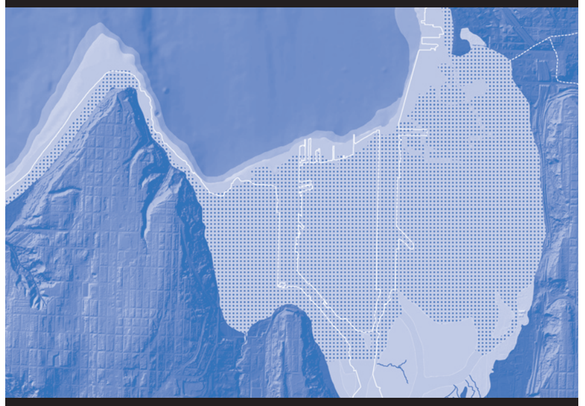

A city map interpreting Seattle history as seen through the lens of its changing shoreline.

Coming Spring 2012

Ron van der Veen

Back to School and Very Un-cool

Hey un-cool dad, would you please move to another country and just send me money?

I will admit it. Anyone who has followed this column for a while knows that I am fixated on my image as a hip, urban designer.

In the past, I've written about cool parties, cool clothes, cool glasses, cool toys, cool architectural words, cool houses (even Koolhaas!) and cool camping. And slathered on these topics is a cathartic attempt to analyze and enhance my guise. Never do I feel the disconnect between the hip I want to be and the un-hip I really am more than at this time of year when my three sons start school (Johan is now a senior in high school; Nathanael is a sophomore; and Ronny Jr. is starting 8th grade). Reconnecting with the most important cultural influence in their lives clearly reiterates to them how "like, totally not cool" dad is.

Over the years, I have observed that all my boys have commenced thinking I am un-cool around adolescence. When a boy reaches puberty, his vocabulary reduces by 90% and half the sounds out of his mouth are grunts.

What would you like for breakfast? Idunno…
How was the first day of school? Gooo'…
Is your homework done? Ya…
I think you need new shoes. Mmm…
Is that all you can say? Uh-huh…

All these murmurs and brute groans send one very articulate message: *Hey un-cool dad, would you please move to another country and just send me money?*

With my first two sons, I tried very hard to prove I still had street cred. As a kid in the late '70s and early '80s, I actually used to rap and break-dance. But no matter how accomplished a person might have been, NO ONE is a good break dancer or rapper at 52. Neighbor kids continue to egg me on to make up raps on the fly, not because they like old school, but because they love the mortified reaction from my sons.

I think a parent hits his or her all-time lowest cool level around a kid's 15th birthday. With driver licenses and subsequent freedom finally in sight, that was about the time Johan and Nathanael started comparing me to other dads and learned it was actually even *cooler* to have an un-cool dad than a cool one. They started bragging about how obsolete I was, like it was a competition among buddies. I remember once helping Johan carry a rather large project to school because he was on crutches. He would only "let me" do it if I promised to walk ten feet behind him, make no eye contact with anyone and place the project on the ground in the hallway so as to ensure I didn't carry it into the classroom. A few years before this he still used to cuddle with me on the sofa. What happened to you, Johan???

At this point, I think I need to defend my parental hipness a bit. I mean, I am an architect, for god's sake! Architects *ARE* cool. If they weren't, why would so many actors play them in movies and TV? When I used to go to my kids' grade school to talk about what I did, I brought nifty models, not spreadsheets or word documents! And how many dads have tattoos and play in rock bands (I've noticed that if I mention that our band covers a song that they like on the radio, they will automatically dismiss that very song as LAME)? They should be embracing my cred, not scorning it!

I made a lot of mistakes with Johan and Nathanael. I think my relationship with Ronny is much better for now. Some of my friends say it is because he is a late bloomer. I say it is because I have learned that saying nothing is the hippest thing I can possibly do. As a matter of fact, I would recommend parents go to mime school to learn to communicate with their adolescent kids. But miming is really only a last resort in case your cell phone loses its juice, making texting impossible… at the dinner table.

I have also learned to watch what I wear now. Dads, you can find the cash to buy new shorts that aren't up to your thighs. Your kids don't know who John Stockton is. As a matter of fact, I now know that the less I wear around my kids, the more tenuous my relationship with them becomes. For some reason, they just aren't into seeing my sleek, shirtless upper body with only 30% body fat. In my vain attempt to relate visually, I have now resorted to buying my clothes at Old Navy. To be honest, I don't think it has helped a bit and the clothes are really tight. I want my Dockers back!

So school starts this month, and my self esteem takes another dive. I keep hearing there is light at the end of the tunnel. Kids seem to appreciate their parents much more when they are away at college. I think I will need to ship Johan to Kuzbekistan Community College to reestablish my relevance in his life. In the meantime, get me out of these tight Euro-jeans because I can hardly breathe!

RON VAN DER VEEN is our brutally candid Side Yard columnist and probably the hippest architect in town. You can reach him with ideas and comments at rvanderveen@DLRGroup.com.

Directory

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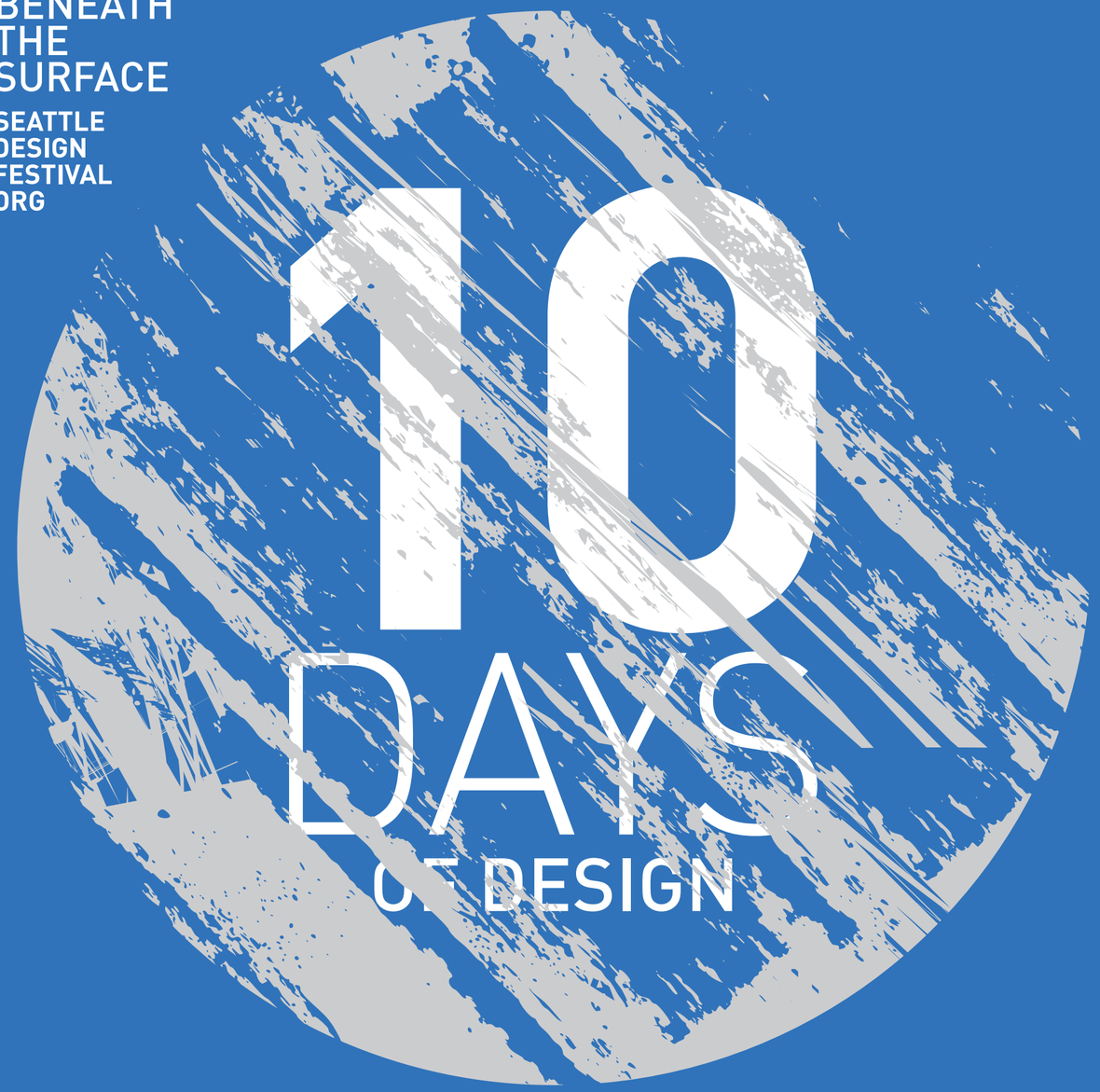

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